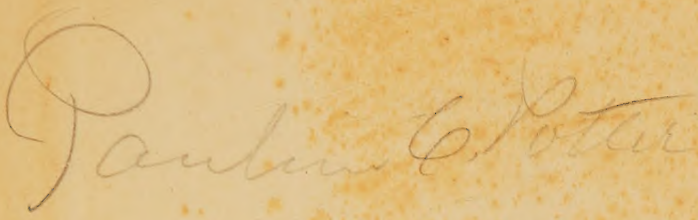
Cobweb

George Agnew Chamberlain



COBWEB

Books by

GEORGE AGNEW CHAMBERLAIN

COBWEB
HOME
THROUGH STAINED GLASS
JOHN BOGARDUS
WHITE MAN
NOT ALL THE KING'S HORSES
TAXI
PIGS TO MARKET
IS MEXICO WORTH SAVING?

HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK
Established 1817

Cobweb

By

George Agnew Chamberlain

Author of

"HOME" "WHITE MAN" Etc.

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS

NEW YORK AND LONDON

COBWEB

Copyright, 1921, by George Agnew Chamberlain
Printed in the United States of America

H-V

COBWEB

COBWEB

Chapter One

MR. C. G. RITTENHOUSE BOURNE stepped into the elevator of the eminently respectable hotel which had housed him through the summer months and absent-mindedly considered the wine-colored pressed leather of its paneling. He was more than half-consciously aware of the fact that he was in a brown study and it struck him that a brown study went well with wine-colored paneling.

Out of this blank, this hiatus of the faculties of perception and involuntary suspension of the rules of proper deportment, he stared steadily, comprehensively, but quite unseeing, at the only other passenger in the car until he was suddenly brought out of coma into precipitous motion by the rasping voice of the operator repeating in a loud voice, "Your floor, Mr. Bourne," and adding in a meanful undertone, "unless you wish to ride to the roof, sir."

Mr. Bourne strode swiftly toward his room, but halfway down the spacious, empty hall he

stopped as suddenly as though he had been bridled and a rough hand had caught up the curb rein. He assumed a rigid position and with narrowed eyes summoned back in minute detail the lingering vision of the other passenger, which, independently of any volition on his part, had been stamped on the allotted photographic tablet of his brain as securely as though it had been filed in a cabinet for future reference.

Bourne at thirty was a novice in none of the elementals of life. There were indications in his erect carriage, carelessly worn clothes, and in the engaging openness of his countenance which seemed to proclaim that here was a man who had both played and worked, studied and frivoled, taken root and torn himself away, spent a great deal of money and earned a little. He was not an average American; he was just that much above the mean in physical equipment as it takes to make a stroke oar against the competition within the limits of a university. In culture he had the advantage of a well-to-do father who was impatient of the petty engagements of the social treadmill and yet had been in no hurry to see his son in harness.

"Travel, my boy," the elder Bourne had exclaimed on a memorable occasion. "To blazes with tennis, golf, and regatta fixtures; forget the

conclave of coaches for the fall football season. The man who stops to play with his college years just after they are over is like a boy in long trousers hankering after marbles. He's faced the wrong way. Plenty of time to go back and really help if you will only go on somewhere first. Move. Head out to sea."

So Bourne had been widely abroad, twice at his father's expense and once in the pay of his government, the last a lively sojourn closely connected in its small way with the collapse of the Central Powers.

All this has been said not as an introduction to Bourne, but to emphasize the fact that no usual or insignificant occurrence could have made him stop stock still in a deserted hallway and stare with eyes thoroughly alive at something they had blindly seen in the immediate past. Something had happened in the elevator, something extraordinary and unforgetable. Whatever that something had been, Bourne was now reviewing its occurrence not as an unattached incident, but with all the detailed adjuncts which lend meaning to any given event, in itself of little importance.

The vision which filled his eyes was the memory of his fellow passenger. She was girl or woman, somewhere in the uncharted years

between twenty-one and thirty, but her age had no bearing on his retrospective interest. What amazed him in the course of his vivid recollection, short of the astounding climax of the event of little importance, was that his brown study had not surrendered at once to the discovery of one of those too-seldom recurring breaks in the monotonous line of pampered womanhood which divide the existences of lucky men into epochs.

Sheer feminine beauty is a common enough sight to those who walk the streets of its mightiest market, for with the simultaneous advent of the cabaret, the night theater, the moving-picture agency, and an astonishing flood of ready money it has become a primal instinct among pretty faces from far and wide to turn toward the clearing house of Broadway as naturally as the sunflower follows its golden god. On the other hand, distinction has become rare within the confines of Manhattan. Its sum in individuals may not have changed, but it has been crowded out of the public eye, smothered by the overwhelming influx of the outlander.

The girl in the elevator had added distinction to beauty of a peculiar type. Bourne's well-trained sense of values established that premise without question, but when it came to determining whether her uniqueness in a standardized

world arose from breeding or from marked anatomical divergence, his judgment hesitated, hung poised, and then tipped the balance away from Knickerbocker heredity and in favor of the less subtle solution of physical appearance. She was remarkable because she looked it.

The startling factor in the indelible impression she had made on his momentarily suspended senses was the conjunction of pallor and health. Women who are pale by no trick of thinned blood or cosmetics or seclusion in darkened rooms, but by a rare disposition of the constellations which govern the intricacies of birth, have always stood out brightly, often fatefully, against the drab background of humanity in the bulk. Above all others of their sex, they have reversed the objectivity of the universe, taking the world for a plaything instead of being the playthings of the world.

The girl had stood with both hands resting on the handle of a high parasol, her figure erect, her shoulders slightly braced, her face upturned and quite immobile. From head to foot she was dressed in a harmony of shades which blended so among themselves and at the same time were welded so vividly into the wine-colored wainscoting of the elevator that she seemed a still-life picture painted flat upon a panel. On her head

she wore a floppy hat of sunshine-yellow, trimmed with brown-eyed Susans. The same note of brown shone in her eyes, the same tone of reflected light faintly enlivened the smooth pallor of her cheeks. Her linen dress was of tan with wide fluted ruffles of white at the open neck and flaring from each wrist. The lines of her body were veiled, but there was the suggestion of length that is never absent from the human frame when it is nobly proportioned.

The air of distinction lay lightly upon her, as though it hovered, not quite sure of welcome. It was as if there were a division between it and its objective, as if it fluttered over her impersonality half determined to paint the lily, and the lily answered with serene indifference, "I am a flower." Bourne was aware in memory even of her half-dropped eyelids, of their astonishing whiteness, like the curved petals of a paper rose. The dark lashes were set upon them in startling contrast—shadows cast on snow—and it was from beneath their shelter that the astounding event sprang out upon him. Even as he turned to leave the elevator a single great tear had squeezed over the tender barrier that opposed it, raced slow, then fast down the oval of her cheek, and leaped to destruction.

That tear had been as surprising as a single

drop of rain from a clear sky. It had been preceded by not the slightest facial convulsion of weeping; it had brought about no change in the immobility of expression in the girl's still face; it had just happened, apparently without her volition or consent or even knowledge. It was a rogue tear, broken away from the herd, complete in itself and busy with an individual mission.

It is difficult to measure the strength of the emotions aroused in Bourne by this trifling occurrence. When he stopped short in the hall at the first full realization of what had happened he was immediately excited and tormented by a host of questions. Why had that one tear fallen? Was it because of the rudeness and persistence of his blank stare? Hardly. As he looked back he was sure that the girl had been in as deep a brown study as his own. He was equally sure that the tear had nothing to do with food, shelter, or the less elementary divisions of want, for no little part of the effect of refinement which the stranger conveyed could be attributed to that placid atmosphere which imbues people who habitually do not think of money. She had not the appearance of opulence, but of easy security.

Whence, then, that tear? Could it have arisen from the sources of unrequited love? Bourne shook his head in denial. Experience had ac-

quainted him with the extraordinary mobility of expression which haunts the faces of women in the grip of the master passion. The joy and the misery of a woman in love are unmistakable; to the initiated they are painted boldly across the features and escape general detection only by virtue of the individual egoism that blinds the public gaze. No, the pale girl was not in love. He was sure of it; nor could he conceive that the lone tear arose from any purely incidental disappointment.

With a characteristic shrug of one shoulder he attempted to shake off the puzzle and proceeded slowly to his room, but when he had entered and slammed the door behind him his first move was to sit down on the edge of the bed and stare absorbedly at the floor. Apparently the puzzle had no intention of being lightly thrown; it was going to ride him. He frowned at himself as the sanest men do when they are alone. What a fool he had been. Why had he not continued in the elevator to the roof, if necessary, and said, as casually as possible, "Is there anything I can do?"

No sooner had he given birth to that thought than he began to despise himself for its true motive. If the woman had been ugly or old or painted or commonplace, the tear would have

meant nothing to him beyond a moment's idle speculation. It was because the girl, as he remembered her more and more vividly, was unusual and entrancing, because she filled the eye and tantalized the mind, because the tear itself was not as other tears, but rounder, more lucent, and inexplicably precious in the face of its reckless self-destruction, that he could not turn his thoughts to weightier matters. His whole mind had been kidnapped by a runaway drop of saline water.

Such being the accomplished fact, it remained for him to decide what he was going to do about it. The most practical step toward establishing the identity of the stranger would be to approach the elevator attendant with a two-dollar bill. That alone would not get him very far, as the girl must certainly be a recent arrival, else his discovery of her would have occurred sooner. In all probability her name would be known only at the office. Some hotels, like clubs and banks of good standing, guard the privacy of their patrons by every means in their power, but Bourne was aware that even such a model of institutional deportment as the dignified hostelry he inhabited could be outwitted. Waiters' checks had to be signed and waiters are notoriously amenable to cash argument. There were

other ways, but the individual elevator boy who might be expected to remember the girl was a necessary first link in any chain.

He half arose to go out and make a start, but sank back as if a light yet firm hand had been laid on his shoulder. The thought had come to him that already a quality of gossamer hung upon this chance encounter, a veiling mist of fancy which would be torn beyond repair by the intrusion of any of the sordid agents of hotel acquaintanceships. To his own astonishment, he felt that he had been on the verge of a vandalism, of committing the incongruity of investigating the dust on butterflies' wings with a borrowed grimy finger. Then his absorbed eyes fell on a half-packed bag and he awoke to the fact that he had just eighteen minutes to catch his train.

There is nothing that will clear the mind of idle speculations in romance like just eighteen minutes to catch a train. Bourne was an experienced week-ender. In four of the eighteen minutes he had completed his packing and was at the telephone ordering porter and taxi; then he stared at his bag and in imagination painstakingly garbed himself for the night, for the day, and for the evening. A black tie was missing, as usual. He snatched one from the dresser, tucked it into his pocket to save time, and then

patted all his other pockets, murmuring, "Money, keys, smokes, matches, handkerchief, mileage." He gave a satisfied nod and opened the door to the porter's knock.

On the train, which he caught with two minutes to spare, he found himself divided between an inclination to return to his preoccupation regarding the person of mystery and wonder as to why Boies Stephen had been so determined on his breaking other engagements to spend that particular Sunday with him. The prosaic landscape, the insistence at every stage in the journey of the commonplace and of the thoroughly expected, proved the death of romance in the bud. The Bourne of half an hour ago began to appear to the Bourne of the moment a completely ridiculous day dreamer. In his new mood he lost all curiosity even as to Boies's impending revelations, and turned to a soporific reading of the evening paper, news, editorial columns, advertisements, and all.

He was met at the station by Stephen, who, after a first greeting, drove him in silence through familiar, fronded streets, around well-remembered corners, and along the bay shore. For the first time in his experience Bourne was shocked by the discovery that large areas of the suburban world are inexpressibly flat, irre-

spective of the contours of the soil. It seemed to his newly troubled senses of perception that the country homes of the wealthy surrounding his native city seldom symbolized hill, dale, and meadowland, but proclaimed in proud tones, "So many acres!" and that the homes of the near wealthy never touched that cord in the human heart which vibrates to the thought of embowered coziness hidden in a narrow lane, but cried out, "This is a double lot, two hundred feet deep." The absence of fences and walls produced a sort of communal beauty at the price of a general rubbing of elbows; windows glared at one another; privacy was nowhere.

It was in this mood that he arrived at the Stephen place, somewhat more pretentious in appearance and setting than its neighbors, but still very much in the public eye. As he stepped from the motor the black tie which he had stuffed hurriedly into his pocket fell to the ground. Boies Stephen picked it up, handed it to him, and said, with a faint, forced smile:

"You won't be needing that, old top. No dressing in this shack to-night or any other night."

They entered the house and Bourne was struck at once by its air of desertion, all the more remarkable for the fact that everything in the great living room was as he had expected

to find it. The filigree screen of ebony, a present from himself, standing in dark silhouette before the cavernous mouth of the big fireplace; the cushions in used disorder; the rugs, one rumpled as from the pounce of a child in play; the chairs still set in the positions of some recent conversational gathering, all seemed to assert occupancy and yet were indescribably mute.

A house can be empty and still speak of children in some near-by field or of its mistress hurrying to return. Expectancy is not a quality of the mind alone; it fills a room, stirs draperies, rests like a tangible but invisible bloom on silently waiting tables and chairs, and knits the inanimate fixtures of a home, enlivened by its subtle pervasion, into the warp and woof of family life. It was the total absence of this accustomed air that struck Bourne immediately upon his entrance.

"Look here, Boies," he exclaimed, pausing in his stride, "what's become of the kids?"

Stephen tossed his hat and his guest's on a corner table and turned to take a match from the mantel. He lit a cigarette with exaggerated deliberation and stared at the flame until it threatened to burn his fingers. "They're not here," he said, dropping the cinder on the hearth. "I have sent them over to my mother's

for a while. Now don't rush yourself," he added. "Sit down and stretch out your legs. My fast-diminishing stock of wassail still can offer you a welcoming cup."

He pressed a bell button, and presently a maid appeared bearing a tray with decanter and glasses. Bourne was not deceived by the flippant words of his host; he obeyed, he sat down and drank his drink with grateful appreciation of the quality of the liquor, but he was not put at ease. He frowned steadily at the somber fire screen and tried to conjure images of the children and their mother back into the room. He could not quite summon the youngsters without the aid of their accustomed whoops of welcome, but Amelie came clearly to his vision.

He had always wondered about her. She was the wife of his best friend; he had known her longer and seen her in more of the moods of wholesome life than any other woman of his acquaintance, yet she had always left a question in his mind. She was one of those individuals who are never altogether penetrable, not from depth nor from the spread of their byways of personality, but because they offer to themselves no clear answer to such basic questions as: "Why am I here? Whither am I going?" and consequently carry no sure message to others.

Even so, this quality of impenetrableness had seemed to lend her a security beyond that of the average woman of her class. She was not easily approachable; she shed off intimacies as a duck sheds water, and yet in all social amenities she showed an affability that was not skin deep like an acquired veneer, but the hall-mark of an inherited tradition. Such being the case, one was led to imagine her unusually freed of ordinary temptations, and Bourne could understand why she should have stood up to matrimony more successfully than the majority of the married women in his circle, but frowned in bewilderment at the suspicion that the question she had always left in his mind had at last borne some kind of fruit.

He recalled her clearly as he had last seen her in this room, her brown hair parted a little to one side and dressed to the high crest of its natural wave. The slimness of her figure in a cherry-colored gown, the length and roundness of her bare arms, the peculiar twist of her mobile lips, the vividness of the coloring in her flushed cheeks were all dominated by the brilliancy of her dark eyes, which spoke loudly of vitality, but even in the most unguarded moment gave no whisper of the soul.

Stephen uncrossed his knees and leaned for-

ward to toss the butt of his cigarette into the fireplace; then he turned squarely toward Bourne and made the statement which had been impending throughout the long silence. "Ritt, Amelie has left me."

Chapter Two

IT was characteristic of the two friends that they did not plunge immediately into a discussion of cause and effect. Bourne made no reply whatever to Stephen's declaration. He arose, walked aimlessly around the room, and then suggested a tour of the garden. They walked out hatless, examined the model chicken-run, the half-finished tennis court, the poplar windbreak which was just getting nicely started, and then stopped to stare long and silently at the children's sand-pile under a wide-spreading, lonely apple tree.

The maid came out to announce dinner. They followed her into the house, each immersed in his own thoughts, and took opposite seats at the square, candle-lighted table. Had two women found themselves thus alone with an absorbing subject waiting to be thrashed out, it would not have waited. It would have popped to the surface with the soup, and all subsequent courses would have been subjected to the ignominy of being picked at with only the most casual appreciation. But men are different. They have an age-long respect for the etiquette of food. For generations past and through generations to come this deference to the eating

board has and will be the subject of mockery, but only because it is misunderstood. Among men of even moderate culture it is not founded upon greed, but is a mere item in a broad system of tolerance which takes comfort in giving fair play to each of the varied elements of every-day life.

Thus business is seldom talked at men's business luncheons, but after them; and thus Stephen and Bourne talked on the most general topics with long, frankly gastronomical pauses, even while their minds were dominated by the slowly gathering forces of an impending sober and intimate communion. Occasionally they measured each other with mildly speculative glances; for a man seldom knows his friend of the moment. He knows the college mate of yesterday and the schoolfellow of the days before, but the companion of a present hour must be balanced anew, especially during the first years of contact with the open world.

Stephen was the very junior member of an exceedingly old law firm; his annual income from this and other sources was in the neighborhood of fourteen thousand dollars, with assurance of steady increase. In all legal matters he was a sharp-faced youth of quick perception. As a consequence, a mere glance at a letter

written by his firm to an up-state lawyer who had suddenly come to the fore as a master of new aspects in international law, offering him a full partnership and a guaranteed retainer of eighty thousand dollars a year, had set the young man to thinking. Why was this country bumpkin worth so large a fee? Because the war had proved a forcing house for a single essential aptitude, ready equipped to meet an imminent demand.

The hint had proved more than sufficient. Stephen had promptly taken international litigation for his slogan, and for two months had been putting himself through a course of reading more severe than the hardest cramming of his student days. Without taking anyone into his confidence, he was determined to prepare himself for a place in what promised to be the van of his profession.

Bourne's position is less easily defined. In the first place, he was the son of John Elman Bourne, and without knowledge of the full implication of that monumental name in the sphere of American industry, one cannot fully place the son. He was in unusual measure the product of his father, but at the period of this week-end visit he was yet in the process of development and still far from being graduated as a completed article from the parental forge. Incidentally, his in-

come, derived from money left to him by his mother and from varying salaries accruing from a succession of positions in several distinct branches of the huge system of which his father was the head, amounted on the average to a little more than Stephen's. Technically, he might be classified as an industrial engineer.

Ten years ago the circumstances of both these young men, the one with a family and the other with thoughtlessly extravagant tastes, would have been considered affluent, but the months succeeding the war had gradually brought each to his senses. Neither was conscious of having changed his habits in the slightest degree, yet, with the rest of humanity, each had had to bow to an inexorable fact. Money was not what it used to be. Under the pressure of this perennially new truth it was natural that Bourne should attempt to trace all troubles to its single source.

"Boies," he said, by way of introduction, when they had finished dinner and were lounging over their cigars in the living room, "if you were hard up, why didn't you shout?"

"Hard up!" replied Stephen, promptly. "Who isn't hard up?" He sprang to his feet, took a quick step, and then turned to face his friend. "But *that!*" he exclaimed, and snapped his

fingers contemptuously. "Money is easy enough to get—easier than it ever was."

A peculiar change came over his expression and his bearing. While his thoughts had been busy with a practical equation, his stocky figure had been erect, his dark eyes alert, but with the dismissal of the concrete suggestion he seemed to slump. His chin dropped forward and he stared through and beyond Bourne quite blankly, as though he were dismayed by the necessity of putting in words the maddeningly futile speculations which had been tormenting him. Any legal puzzle, however intricate or deep or baffling, would have enlivened him, put him on his mettle to make clear to another at least just where were the knots in the tangled skein; but before the least of the million vagaries of eternal woman he became limp.

"What was it, then?" asked Bourne, after a long pause.

"I don't know," said Boies.

"Didn't she tell you anything?" cried Bourne, growing impatient. "Did she walk off without saying a word?"

"Oh no," answered Stephen, with a shake of his shoulders as though he tried to wake himself from a trance. "I'll tell you all about it, shall I? Just as it happened."

"Go ahead," said Bourne, heartily. "That's what you brought me here for, wasn't it?"

"Yes, that's what I brought you here for," repeated Boies, absently, and then gathered his wits for the comparatively easy task of straight narrative.

"Money didn't come into it at all," he began. "Of course, we felt the pinch like everybody else —at least, I did. Amelie told me three separate times that I would have to increase her house allowance, and I did. That's all there was to that. I can't imagine anyone ever asking Amelie what she did with money. Can you?"

Bourne paused before replying. Again he found it remarkably easy to visualize Amelie. Apparently he had catalogued her expressions, although he was not conscious of ever having made a study of them. He could see the very look with which she would have received an announcement from Boies that they had come into a million, and, much to his surprise, he was convinced that it was the same look which would have greeted news that they were penniless. "No, I can't," he answered.

"Of course you can't," said Stephen, and continued as though he had been reading his friend's thoughts: "If you handed her a check for a hundred thousand or a dollar bill I believe you'd

get the same reaction. If you told her there was nothing to spend, she wouldn't weep about the children needing new shoes; she'd let them go barefoot. And about the time their stock of clothes was giving out you'd find her walking south where they could go naked and live. I don't mean she was heartless, but just everlastingly practical without being small. She'd walk through little troubles the way you walk through grass—without seeing it. And that's what makes it so maddening."

"Makes what so maddening?"

"The whole confounded affair," continued Stephen. "It began when I got back from the other side. I caught her several times making a study of me as you would study a strange fish in the aquarium. No affection in her look; just mild curiosity with a yawn at the end of it. I stood it for weeks, then finally I flew off the handle just after I got in from town early last Saturday afternoon with a stack of books under my arm that made me feel like a schoolboy. I asked her for Heaven's sake what was the matter; to speak up and get her troubles out of her system. She stared at me for a second, then threw up her head and looked away and said she was tired of 'looking out of windows,' whatever that meant."

"Why didn't you ask her?"

"I did, but she wouldn't answer. Instead she said she was tired of me, too, and of the children, and that incidentally she was going away on the six-ten. I knew, without asking, she meant she was going away for good. I dropped the books with a crash and took a step forward; but she didn't look at me. Her body just trembled in that shrinking way a woman's does when she doesn't want to be touched."

"How do *you* know she didn't want to be touched?" demanded Bourne.

Stephen flashed at him a look of exasperation. "What do you think I'm made of?" he asked. "Do you think I wouldn't have given a house and lot to take her in my arms and pet her? But I knew better. There are things a married man hasn't a right to say, but I'm feeling particularly unmarried at this moment and I tell you, Ritt, that there are women who can live with a man for years without being possessed. I loved Amelie; I love her now. As far as I am concerned there isn't another woman in the world, but I never got her, never. I can't expect you to understand that; I didn't understand it myself until this ghastly week. It knocked me off my pins to look back and check up the moments in our life together that haven't been casual.

The long and the short of it is that I didn't know Amelie well enough to take liberties with her."

"Rot!" said Bourne.

"Exactly," countered Boies, as though the answer were just what he had expected. "I stood there," he continued, "and fired questions at her. I appealed to her first on the score of the children, and she said it had always been a question in her mind whether children, once they were weaned, weren't better off without parents than with. I asked her if it was money, and she shrugged her shoulders and said, 'No.' I asked her if it was another man, and she said, 'Boies, you are like a copybook reciting itself aloud.' I tell you, Ritt, she made me feel like a fool, and that's just what I was. I said: 'That's no answer. Tell me, is it Ritt Bourne?'"

"What?" cried Bourne, springing to his feet in stupefaction and advancing threateningly toward his friend. "Look here, are you joking or are you crazy?"

Stephen continued as though he had not been interrupted. "All she said to that was that it was the next line out of the copybook, the one about its always being the man's best friend; then she added as a sort of afterthought that you reminded her of a stream just above tidewater, traveling one way all the time and moving slow."

In spite of himself, Bourne's attention was arrested as would any man's be by the sure lure of a woman's valuation of himself. He tried to think of Amelie saying those words and found that they fitted her, although he could not remember ever hearing her make a speech of such combined malice and depth. He began to feel at a loss, as though he had been called to pass judgment on an Amelie he had met but never known. "Traveling one way all the time and moving slow," hung in his mind like a fog and exasperated him, because the phrase was too blurred for complete perception and yet suggested a hidden light. He turned on Boies as a vent for his discomfiture.

"But will you please explain," he said, sharply, "just why you dragged me into this thing?"

He was taller by half a foot than Stephen and, without aspiring to any godlike regularity of feature, he had the erect carriage and forward bearing that one associates with the Apollo Belvedere. The set of his neck rising from squared shoulders, and the poise of his head, well formed and with its lines neatly accentuated by the peculiar clinging quality that goes with crisp hair, gave him an air of buoyancy that in itself seemed to deny Amelie's veiled deduction of a stagnant nature. Apparently he was more than

a match for the shorter man, but even in the heat of his annoyance there was a saving gleam in his gray eyes of respect for the well-remembered physical sturdiness of his chum's compact frame.

"Sit down, you bully," said Stephen, without taking his hands from his pockets. "You asked me to tell you what happened and that's what I'm doing. Amelie said I picked on you because it was the next thing in the copybook, but, off-hand, I should say it was because you have a way of absorbing women into an atmosphere and turning them into so much furniture as if they were so many chairs with good, bad, or indifferent lines, but useful to sit on. And they like it, by Gad! they like it!"

"You're mad," commented Bourne, "stark, staring mad. I forgive you."

"If thinking on one subject for a week makes you mad," said Boies, "why, then I'm as mad as a hatter. Why not stand up to the truth just for a change? Do you think I blame your general attitude? I've been counting over our particular college set of eight, you unmarried, five of the seven of us divorced or separated, and now this inane, unreasonable, and incomprehensible mix-up of my own; and as for the women one meets just knocking around as you

do, if you find a happy one you think her mind must be touched."

"You're drawing a long bow," said Bourne, impatiently. "This sort of talk doesn't get us anywhere."

"Of course," admitted Boies, "there are thousands of people that marry and stay married, but nine times out of ten it's a union by circumstances and not of personalities. I'm not talking just to hear myself or to raise a row. I'm in dead earnest. I don't know where I went wrong; I don't even know that I did go wrong. Personally, I don't think that our world, yours and mine, has gone wrong in general, but that the women of this country have caught the chestnut blight; and if you can find a healthy chestnut tree anywhere east of the Mississippi to-day, I'll eat it."

Bourne threw back his head and laughed, but Stephen did not join him; he continued. "You can laugh," he said, "because you're not a proprietor, but you know in your heart that all the women you've met lately come into three classes of lumber—a lot of dead wood built solidly and resignedly into bread-and-butter homes, a lonely trunk here and there clinging desperately to a few tufts of God-green leaves; and, finally, a forest of sapless trees turned to a nasty black. It's so, isn't it?"

Bourne had seated himself again. He stared for a moment at the glowing ember of his cigar, from which he had just struck the ash. There is something in any live fire that has always awakened the imaginative and fantastic faculties of man; from childhood to the grave we find visions of hope and recollection within the boundless limits of an incandescent coal. And so Bourne found his vision in the garnet red of his cigar. Through that luminous oriel he looked upon the pale woman of the afternoon. She was startlingly near and alive; serenity and an inexpressible freshness in entrancing contradiction seemed to play across her features. What was she? he asked himself, absently, dead wood, blight, or God-green leaves?

"Isn't it?" repeated Stephen, insistently.

Bourne came to, almost with a gasp. "I don't know, Boies," he said, soothingly. "Perhaps. We've all been fooled a lot, but I, for one, can't help clinging to a sort of national faith that's necessary to my individual life and comfort. You can't talk about such things without sounding silly, but it's true that every man and woman in the flesh, no matter how beloved, has a dream rival. I know very little about enduring passion, but, speaking from the outside, it seems to me that all great love affairs must

hang on an unusual capacity for illusion, a genuine faculty for superimposing the ideal on the real."

"You make me tired with your big words for a worn-out idea," said Stephen. "What you are trying to say is that love is blind. We all recognize that as a physiological fact; but when you pile on a scheme for making it stay blind, I simply don't follow you."

"I didn't think you would," said Bourne, mildly. "I'm not sure that I followed myself. What happened after you took my name in vain and insulted Amelie with that impertinent accusation?"

"The coolest one-sided conversation you ever heard," replied Boies. "I asked her where she was going and she said thank God she didn't know, but she did know she had to take the beastly train to get there. Then I asked her how she thought she was going to live, and all she said was, 'How does anybody live?' She didn't seem any more worried or responsible than a sparrow on a bright morning. Then I came back to the children and asked her what I was going to do about them, and she said: 'There you go again. You're like a flat wheel with the bump every time you come around to the children. Just let them grow and perhaps you'll learn

something.' I asked her what she meant by that, and she shrugged her shoulders and went upstairs to pack a bag."

"Was there any more argument after that?" asked Bourne.

"Argument!" exploded Boies. "Do you call that an argument? There's a bit of old-fashioned stone wall left at the bottom of the garden and if you want to show me how to argue with it I'll go along."

"Well, what did happen?" persisted Bourne.

"Nothing," said Stephen. "I drove her to the train myself, and when we got to the station she said, 'Don't get out,' took her bag, and sidled off toward the platform, while she held me off with a look over one shoulder, the oddest look you ever saw. It was a sort of *pot-pourri* of nonchalance, pity, wonder, amusement, tolerance, and apathy against a background of hope without expectation. Does that mean anything to you?"

"It does," said Bourne, promptly. "That's the look any woman gives any man when she has decided not to bother with fooling him any longer."

Stephen gazed in surprise at the unexpected answer, passed it through a rapid mental digestion, and then bowed with ironical self-abase-

ment. "I take off my hat," he said. "You ought to know."

"Nothing personal," remarked Bourne, calmly. "We all ought to know, but we never do at the time. I'll have to think this thing out, Boies," he continued, "and talk it over with J. E. It would do you good to do that same thing. There is something about my old man that makes me back him against any tangle of life as you and I know it. You needn't be afraid of him any more than you are of me. He will take an intimacy and hold it in the hollow of his clean hand as tenderly as a kiddie cradles a doll."

Again Stephen stared in amazement at an image invoked by his friend's words. Up to that moment his conception of John Elman Bourne had been one of a Titan showing dimly through an obscuring mist of industrial upheaval, of an unhallowed god riding and guiding the storm to his own specific ends. Equally with a limited public he knew him vaguely as a genius of reconstruction on a colossal scale; but it had never been brought home to him that the qualities which make for regeneration are the same whether they be applied to the clogged arteries of a vast enterprise or to the little exigencies of an individual life.

"I could never do it," he said, doubtfully.

"Do what?" asked Bourne.

"Talk to your dad like—like this."

Bourne smiled at him encouragingly. "You don't know J. E.," he said. "You have never seen him except at a club or two where you run into him by accident and say, 'How do you do, sir? Everything all right with you, sir?' and beat it for the card room, for fear he'll blast you with some edict of tremendous meaning."

Stephen smiled in spite of himself. "Well," he admitted, "doesn't that show you?"

"No, it doesn't," replied Bourne; he paused for a moment and then continued: "We open the house on Monday. Give me a day or two to prepare him—for your sake, mind you, not for his—and then you blow in with a bag and stay a week or a month while you look around. If I were you I'd straighten things out a bit here because probably the first thing he'll tell you to do is to sell this place, get rid of it for good and all."

"What makes you say that?" asked Stephen, curiously.

"I don't know," said Bourne, promptly. "It's just an intuition, a hunch." He tossed his dead cigar into the fireplace, sighed, stretched, selected another, and lit it. "Boies," he continued, after a long pause, "now that all that is

settled, what would you do if you were alone in an elevator with a quite adorable girl and for no apparent reason in the world a single round tear should run down her cheek with a frightened look of its own and hurl itself into space?"

Stephen wasted a withering look on his unseeing companion, grunted twice, and presently asked, in an incisive voice of suppressed emotions, "The tear didn't stay in space, did it?"

"No, I suppose not," replied Bourne, absently.

"Well, in that case," continued Stephen, curtly, "I would have got down on my knees and lapped it off the floor as a pick-me-up."

"I suppose you would," murmured Bourne; which saying proves that he was not quite so absent-minded as he appeared.

Chapter Three

NOTHING has been said to indicate that the girl of the elevator was an adventuress, but such was the case. If one be permitted to divorce that term from the monopoly of an opprobrious significance and read into its meaning those attributes of the high heart which alone can launch the ship of individual fortune by a deliberate effort of the will upon uncharted seas, she might even be classified as a superadventuress. She had appeared unheralded at the hotel during a period when guests are few and rooms a drug on the market; which may account in part, but only in part, for the punctilious welcome which was extended to her despite lack of escort or formal introduction. In no small measure did the key of her reception take its note from her quaint mode of requesting accommodation.

"I would like a room with a window upon the Avenue," she had said, with a sweet gravity, first to the doorman, resplendent in gold and gray, then to the buttons who had seized her bag, and, finally, to the amused room clerk, whose sophisticated smirk faded in exact ratio to the growing wonder and admiration in his

eyes as they comprehended a loveliness so indubitably fresh that in a circumambient of expensive cosmetics it seemed positively exotic.

"A room and bath, with window on the Avenue," he murmured, promptly, as he offered her the register and a pen; nor could the patronymic, palpably filched from the social roster, which she indited in an old-fashioned, Spencerian hand, shake his sudden faith in her as an eminently proper tenant for the hostelry within whose portal he played the role of Cerberus.

From the moment of her admittance the girl became a mystery amid those undercurrents which swirl and flow through the administrative channels of any great hotel, but which only the dismay of a catastrophe, such as a suicide or a suddenly exploded scandal, can bring to the surface to display their troubled waters to the public view. There was question as to who she was, whence and why she came, but neither on the first nor any succeeding day did ever occasion arise for a single besmirching whisper. Within a week the entire staff from bellboy to head waiter, as well as the cavernous building itself, seemed to have assumed toward her an air of mothering proprietorship tinged with a tolerant but avid curiosity.

Womankind in general may well demand the recipe for such a unique consummation, and it is easily given. Take twenty-three years of flesh and bone, model it on the clean lines of an adolescent youth, give it the first faint fullnesses which mark the genuine transition of sex, endow its skin with the transparent texture of pallor over a glowing lantern of health, grant it brown eyes with floating freckles of gold, dark lashes, a serene brow, a crown of tawny hair, lips of the color and smoothness of coral—and then let those lips bud slowly to a smile, not as dispensing alms or giving a bribe, but as a mountain spring creeps shyly to the light of day from some deep and hidden source. For such alchemy and for such alchemy alone will the adamantine hearts of the attendants of the metropolis grow soft with the milk of human kindness, and its bricks and mortar assume the attributes of a hen mothering its chicks.

But for all her mystery, the girl was no masterpiece in ivory inviting the immortal invocation to Galatea to

> "Change, golden tresses of her hair,
> To gold that turns to gray;
> Change, silent lips, forever fair,
> To lips that have their day!"

To the casual observer she might indeed appear peculiarly immobile, as though restrained by shyness or a statuesque apathy, but before friendly eyes or in the face of some little act of kindness from any who served her she would become imbued with a tremulous vitality which can be described by no more definite phrase than the glowing smile of the spirit within her.

To no one was she more intimately human, more completely revealed in temperament, than to Janet, the floor maid, who came, as was her invariable custom, to scoff, and remained ultimately to adore, held in a thralldom as inexplicable in detail as it was foreign in general to her cynical habit, acquired during years of varied service.

Janet was not a character; she was one of unnoticeable thousands who tend to business automatically for eight hours a day and then don their street wear, seize upon umbrellas of excellent quality, and fare forth unmarked by the slightest tag of occupation (unless it be those same umbrellas) to take a dignified part in the amusements, home comforts, and extraordinarily impersonal activities of the most democratic community on earth. It can be imagined that she was not easily impressed by slight variations in the monotonous types which ebb and flow

according to season through the hospitality on a cash basis of a great hotel, and as a consequence her almost immediate conquest was all the more remarkable. It took place in the following manner:

She had entered in response to a summons, and with one trained glance had taken in the shabby trunk of ancient and inconvenient design, a bag of equal age and use, a scanty wardrobe already hung in the open closet, and, finally, the girl standing in modest negligée which revealed only by glimpses the snowy whiteness and maidenly simplicity of those more intimate articles of female attire which to the eyes of the initiated afford the surest index to a woman's present and past, as well as plausible grounds of augury as to her probable future. From the girl's hands dangled a pair of silk stockings.

"Did you call for the maid, miss?" asked Janet, curtly, according to formula.

"Yes, I did," replied the girl, with a deliberation and clarity of enunciation which were in themselves notable. "I have just come to town," she continued, "and have had no chance to buy clothes. Is there any way in which I could have these stockings washed quickly—perhaps by to-morrow?"

Because she imagined she sensed hostility in the maid's coldly businesslike attitude, or from whatever other cause, the girl looked at Janet with a pleading intensity in a measure quite disproportionate to her trifling request, as though, instinctively, she were making an immediate appeal for all time. Her lips curved tremulously in an experimental smile and across and down the supreme unconsciousness of her face a single tear took its startled flight like a star missing its hold and falling to nowhere from its rightful place in the bowl of heaven.

Janet's eyes, mouth, and heart flew open. She looked down at the tiny splash on the carpet, up at the lovely face, and the walls of her professional fortress fell beyond rebuilding. "Give me those stockings, my dear," she said, caressingly, much to her own amazement. "I'll wash them for you myself in just one half of a jiffy."

That incident marked the beginning of one of those blind, one-sided alliances between women which usually take the form of an intense but ephemeral infatuation in the younger for the elder, but which, in those rare cases where the ages are reversed, attain eventually to the dignity and prerogatives of a permanent allegiance. With the rapidity that attends any companionship in intimate moments, Janet

learned all there was to know in regard to the characteristics of the fledgling whom she took under her wing, but not one whisper of the nature, condition, or initial habitat from which the tender object of her solicitude had so inexplicably sprung to a ponderous perch in the great city.

The girl's present days and nights held no secret from the maid, but still the stranger remained the stranger behind a rampart of intuitive breeding which opened readily to the trivialities of current curiosity, but which presented an impenetrable front of musing silence at the first suspicion of an attempt to deal freely in personalities. Without apparent intention, the strange girl's attitude was one of possessing no hidden keys to this or that compartment of mystery; she was in herself and without division the locked door.

Janet not only accepted the limitation, but bowed low to it. Wholly unconscious of laboring in a restricted field, she reverted to an epoch when servants were servants and had a care to take no liberties. Even that unwritten rule left her free of so many intimate contacts that she became increasingly unaware of any exclusion and within the week would have sworn stoutly and with a wide stare that every nook and cranny

of her darling's living and prenatal days had been fully revealed, only—she couldn't tell. And she believed it; she believed it doggedly.

Such whole-hearted self-deception would seem incredible except for the flood of incidents which supported it. This sequence of items began with the arrival of the first lot of the girl's purchases. She allowed the boxes to accumulate unopened until late in the afternoon, and then fingered them pensively one by one. Something was troubling her; while her placid brows were not drawn into a frown, there was nevertheless a shadow in her eyes such as comes to warm natures in the face of such elemental emotions as loneliness, curiosity, or the desire that throbs in any heart capable of feeling beauty to share that sensation with another. After long thought and with a wistful quirk of the lips at the inadequacy of the solace, she sent for the maid.

"Janet," she asked, "are you very busy?"

"No, miss," lied Janet, promptly. "I was just going off."

"So early!" exclaimed the girl, with a glance at her quaint Swiss table clock. "What time do you get away?"

"Not until seven-thirty ordinarily, miss. But never mind that. Whatever it is you wish I've got time to do it."

"By the way," said the girl, in the unhurried voice which by its exceptional deliberation always surprised the hearer, "you may call me Miss Alloway. I'm used to it."

"Yes, Miss Alloway," said Janet; and then in answer to a very human and youthful look of appeal she added, "What is it you want, dear?"

"I wish you to open these packages with me," replied the girl.

The wardrobe of woman has never been given its rightful place in the analytical depiction of character. Literature is clogged with consideration of the effects of some special gown, some individual jewel or mystic color; but the conjunctivity of the clothes and adornments possessed by any given woman as a pointer to herself, her actions, and her capabilities has never been appreciated. For instance, a girl will turn up with a single suitcase and an extra hat in a paper bag and will appear correctly dressed and on time to the minute for garden party, dinner, or a ball. Let the same girl arrive with fourteen trunks and two hat boxes and she will be late for every engagement, no matter how long her stay. The inference is obvious; to a woman any occasion for choice is the thief of time.

That frivolous deduction is cast off at random as a single example of the many things mere man

might know in advance if first he could acquaint himself with the exact extent of his lady's equipment down to and including the possession or nonpossession of a rouge pot; but there are considerations that strike much deeper than any such trifling guide to conduct and establish definitely the wardrobe as an integral part of the flesh, bone, and soul of the woman to whom it belongs.

In sizing up Miss Alloway in the light of the contents of the various parcels which she was opening, not hastily, but with the long pauses of the ritual of feminine adoration for any new article of wear, Janet was by no means conscious of studying the principles at the basis of psychological phenomena. The effect produced upon her was cumulative, but purely objective; she only knew that as far as ladyship was concerned, Miss Alloway was forever established in her mind as the real thing.

Her judgment was as intuitive and fully as accurate as that of him who, standing upon a corner and witnessing the passage of a lovely vision garbed in the subdued highlights of superlative taste, exclaims, gravely, "There goes money," but who, if a single feather were added to those selfsame clothes, or one unsure change of shade imposed, would cry, just as

promptly, but with a cynical smile, "There goes somebody's money." Thus showing by the addition of just one word that to an observing temperament a mere maladroit nuance can signify all of a social chasm.

Had Janet had the mentality to think this matter out for herself she would not have been a lady's maid, but a practitioner of psychoanalysis; which lessens by not one whit the mounting ecstasy with which she disclosed one by one Miss Alloway's purchases.

Their sum total was surprisingly small, taking into consideration the size and the number of the boxes, but even the lay mind of man would have found itself peculiarly content with the selection made by the girl, because it was a selection. For instance, there were only nine pairs of stockings, but they came from three shops, and as Janet drew the silken length of each slowly across her bare wrist her eyes involuntarily sought out Miss Alloway and proceeded to dress her in those stockings at once. So with the four hats and the three frocks, the underwear and the nighties; altogether they made an insignificant filmy heap, but there was not a ribbon nor a button nor a fold which did not seem already to have taken on an air of possessor and possessed.

The girl sat on the edge of the bed, with her feet set primly side by side and with her arms outstretched as rigid props to her body. Her shoulders were thrown high by the posture and her head hung forward; but youth in any pose is lovely and Janet turned from consideration of the sweetest of the dresses to stare in whole-hearted envy and admiration.

"Will you try this one on now?" she asked, almost at random.

The girl's eyes did not seem wholly absorbed with the clothes; they were watching Janet, following her spasmodic movements and studying the rapid changes in her mobile face.

"Janet," she said, answering one question with another, "do you think we might go to the play? Are you free?"

"Go to the play, miss?" repeated Janet. "Do you mean you want to see a show?"

The girl nodded and added, "To-night; but I can't go without you."

"Of course not," agreed Janet, promptly, to that assertion, and after a moment's consideration she decided that she could free herself for the evening.

Immediately the girl became all animation. "Dress me," she said, springing to her feet. "You choose, because we haven't a minute to

lose. Where shall I dine? Perhaps I had better have just a sandwich here and it would be well to order a taxi now; sometimes they are hard to get."

"It's more important to get tickets, miss, than anything else," mumbled Janet through a mouthful of wholly unnecessary pins.

"I must tell you the truth," continued the girl. "I must always tell you the truth, mustn't I, Janet? Well, I have the tickets; two of them. I have had them all afternoon."

There are women who get a distinct sensation from preparing others for show, conquest, or sacrifice. Janet had this hidden sense strongly developed and was accustomed to derive a tangible pleasure from its exercise, but, even so, she was awed by the strength of the feeling which came over her as she gave the final touch to Miss Alloway's toilette. The girl seemed too perfect, too much at one with herself to the exclusion of the whole world, too completely contained within a pearly shell of flesh, too intrinsically exclusive to dare the casual contacts of the streets. Janet was almost afraid of the responsibility of piloting her, but, as the event proved, she need not have worried. The girl was human, and whatever is human is endowed with a power of reaction which, if it will, can

defeat even the natural acquisitiveness of the public in the face of a jewel at large and apparently unattached.

They arrived at the theater well before the rise of the curtain, and Janet, who was a faithful patron of the galleries, promptly exhausted the novelty of being in the stalls and soon lost interest in the new handling of an ancient theme. Ordinarily any plot, however threadbare, would have held her to its foregone conclusion, but on this night, the first of many on which she was to act as escort to her adopted charge, she was absorbed in watching surreptitiously the girl at her side.

Had Miss Allowsy been veritably a child, she would soon have attracted the attention of more neighbors than her maid. As it was, she made no overt demonstrations of the commotion within her, but the control which she enforced on her actions and deportment could not dominate her features nor the tumult of her bosom nor the eager light that shone in her eyes. Never before had Janet experienced just such a sense of proximity to an almost overwhelming store of unspent life. She did not have to be told that she was witnessing a first night in the reversed sense, and that for some incomprehensible reason the apparently finished person of Miss

Alloway had never before been subjected to the lure of the footlights.

On this occasion, as on several others, her curiosity got the better of her, but to no avail. She remembered a certain leading question with which she had striven unsuccessfully to persuade the girl to square the name of Miss Alloway with the ostentatious patronymic she had inscribed on the hotel register, but, undaunted by that recollection, as they pressed out toward the exit after the play was over she made the crowd an excuse to hold her companion's cool but trembling arm and to whisper in her ear, "Did you think it was better than most shows?"

For all answer she got a murmur as from one in a trance, "It was wonderful—quite wonderful!"

They came out to wet pavements and a shower. Janet gasped in dismay and looked in vain for the carriage starter or an obliging urchin. The throng, caught unawares, crowded the space under the great glass shelter, and had already loaded attendants with commissions beyond their capacity of prompt fulfillment.

"Wait for me here, dear," she said, placing the girl on the top step with her back to the theater wall. "And watch for me, will you? I'll fetch a cab."

The girl nodded absently and Janet dashed off with a nervous backward glance over her shoulder, as though in doubt as to whether her instructions had been comprehended.

Miss Alloway was wearing a large black velvet hat adorned with a single black bow. Her shoulders were cupped in a little box garment also of black velvet, which had a high flaring collar so wide that it fell softly backward. Just below the shoulder blades this bewitching article of apparel merged into a black-lace coat, the skirts of which she had gathered about her. The transparent lace fell in long folds from her white, ungloved arms and only half veiled the amber reflection of a straw-colored informal frock. She wore luminous stockings and tan kid slippers with plain buckles of gold.

People glanced at her standing erect and unconscious above the level of the crowd, and because she was unconscious they looked again, and finally frankly stared, though without rudeness. They knew instinctively that here was no manikin, no exhibit of fashion, no brazen testimonial of some lover's largess, but a vision, an alliance, a partnership in beauty between a gift of God and the art of man. They turned from their staring with faint, pleasant smiles on their lips, as though each would carry from that mud-

stained spot the haunting recollection of a ray of sunshine striking softly across the autumn storm.

There was one exception to the general rule. A youngish man, very correctly attired, old enough to know better and by that same token old enough to discount many defeats for a single victory, subjected the girl to a scrutiny too intent and at the same time too impersonal to give rise to a merely passing whimsical smile of appreciation. He was no rounder, no professional exponent of approach without introduction, but long experience with the world had superimposed on a foundation of good breeding a cynical disregard for conventions whenever occasion seemed to overbalance the penalties of a breach. Indeed, nothing short of such a training could have enabled him to sense some element of the unusual beyond mere outward appearance in the young woman who was the subject of his minute inspection.

In the first place, it astounded him that she should continue to be serenely unaware of his gaze, and yet such was undoubtedly the case. He passed in rapid review the mediocre play which they had just attended and could find in its plot and general impression no grounds for her abstraction; but her withdrawal from the world about her was patently genuine. The

pallor of her cheeks was faintly tinged with the unmistakable flush of excitement, her lips were parted to her deep breathing, and her eyes were wide, translucent, and unseeing. It seemed abnormal that so noticeable an apparition should be unaccompanied, and if experience teaches one lesson more insistently than another it is that the abnormal is always vulnerable.

Having come to some such conclusion, he reentered the lobby of the theater, presently emerged again, and paused to light a cigarette in close proximity to Miss Alloway. The first puff of smoke drifted vaguely in her direction, and he turned swiftly to make apology.

"That was clumsy of me," he said, touching his hat, "and I beg your pardon." Then he added, with apparent quick perception: "The starter seems to have his hands more than full. Can I be of any service to you? Get your call number or a cab?"

The opening seemed flawless; if she were a woman of his own world she would smile her thanks and dismiss him with the assurance that she was attended; if she were a maiden in distress or on adventure bent, she could ask for no fairer opportunity; if she were neither one nor the other she could still scarcely take offense.

The girl seemed to return very slowly to

consciousness. Her eyes focused with a calm deliberation on his own and gave him gaze for gaze. There was certainly no abstraction in her look; it undressed his insincerity as casually and as cruelly as a child strips the petals from a flower. Then she turned from him as one might turn from a withered stalk to smile on Janet, who was waving frantically from the open door of a honking cab.

"I sincerely beg your pardon," murmured the man as she stepped from his side.

Chapter Four

THE Bournes were of that small, unostentatious group which has never deserted Murray Hill. Father and son lived through the winter and well into the spring of each year in a spacious house just off Madison Avenue, attended by servants who had been with them for a generation and who shared with them the inheritance of an atmosphere. This legacy of an established air could be attributed in part to the house itself, for as man and wife who live together during many years of mutual understanding often take on a physical resemblance to each other, so a habitation which is beloved seals with an unmistakable impression the lives of its tenants. But no little part of the influence of the Bourne residence on its inmates could be traced to a more tender source; the house and all who lived in it seemed to remember Mrs. Bourne.

To Bourne the elder any move such as many of his contemporaries had made to apartments far more convenient in appointments, location, and economy, would have seemed a desertion of his dead wife, but quite apart from that sentiment, intensely felt though never analyzed even to himself, there was another reason for his

constancy. He loved his library. Its two wide casements looked out on a plot of green and a single elm tree which was as unexpected to the stranger as it was familiar to him who had nursed its later years with an indomitable determination to pass its beauty on to his heir. Choice spots in the well-stocked shelves were crowded with faces as of old friends, tried and true, lingering year after year within easy reach of the deepest of the leathern chairs. New volumes were heaped upon the oblong length of the massive center table, awaiting the leisurely sorting which should assign them to the waste basket, the high and cold reference shelves, or to a handy place of honor and affection. The cavernous embrasure of the fireplace had a dignity of its own which on the hottest day brooked no screening nor any decoration save a charred log of yuletide proportions and a heap of ashes, stolid in their assurance that the weather would surely change again in the monotonous march of the seasons.

Added to these tangible features was the lure of long association. To John Bourne this room with its musty air of old leather freshening quickly under human contact, with its patches of subdued light and depths of kindly shadow, had come to be the emblem of that inner life

without which no human existence can justify a material pilgrimage through a too imperfect world. Here more than anywhere else he had known his wife, his son, and himself; here alone he had been safe from the corroding influence of financial power and had renewed from day to day his grip on those simplicities which do not necessarily imply greatness, but which, once lost, condemn even the great to meanness. Here, in an age when Americans of the cities have reverted to cliff dwelling and cling to illusions by their eyelashes, John Bourne lived with feet planted in spacious reality and clung tenaciously to standards.

It was to this room that Boies Stephen descended by natural gravitation in the early morning of the day following his arrival in response to his chum's invitation. During the two weeks which had intervened Boies had had a bad time of it. Without making a direct effort and through a chance talk with an acquaintance he had located Amelie, and the things he subsequently heard, far from doing anything toward allaying his wonder at his wife's actions, had merely served to increase his bewilderment and alarm. As a result his first night in a strange bed at Murray Hill had been exceedingly restless, and at the first sign of day

he had taken a cold plunge, put on a bathrobe, and begun a silent prowl through the premises. He entered the library and, with a shock that carried him back to schooldays, found himself face to face with the master of the house.

Bourne the elder, wrapped in his pajamas and two bathrobes, was sitting in a sheltered nook beside one of the big windows, where the light fell with a slant across his book and incidentally across himself. His feet and legs were outstretched and placed comfortably on a leather upholstered stool of the exact height of his chair seat. At his elbow was a glass and a pitcher of clear, cold water, already more than half emptied.

He glanced up from his reading and, noting the panic-stricken expression on his guest's face, called out, promptly: "Come right in, Boies. Pull up a chair."

Stephen drew his bathrobe tightly about him and advanced into the room. "I'm sorry to have disturbed you, sir," he said. "Did you have a restless night, too?"

"Hardly," replied Mr. Bourne. "I can't remember having a restless night." A quizzical look came into his eyes and he added: "I'll amend that because even a half lie looks bad in this early morning light. I'll put it this way—I won't remember a restless night, ever."

He smiled, and Stephen promptly smiled back. As he expressed it to Ritt Bourne an hour or two later, "Your dad, Ritt, has one of those 'answer paid' smiles."

"Pull up a chair," repeated Mr. Bourne. "Stretch your legs; there's plenty of room."

Stephen did as he was bidden. He dragged a big chair into position half facing his host, and rested his crossed ankles on the benchlike footstool. Then he began frankly to study John Bourne with a nonchalance which ten minutes earlier would have seemed to him beyond the possibility of years of acquaintance.

He saw a large, heavy man with sparse sandy hair, an oddly egg-shaped head, and a face which would have been without distinction had it not been for two features. The eyes were small, but so brilliant and kindly that they absorbed the vision of others and seemed to open up to imagination a white road reaching toward a far horizon. As he looked into them Stephen found himself thinking in complete detachment, "Follow the white line and you can't go wrong."

The other notable feature was the large and somewhat pendulous nose. The more one studied it the more it appeared to take on the proportions of a flying buttress stolen from some cathedral wall. It was the keystone of the

John Bourne character, fortune, and career. The slight curves of its long lines were the curves of the stem of a mighty ocean liner, carrying an implication of power and of a forging ahead through heavy seas. It was too rounded, however, to deny a sense of humor, but suggested only mighty convulsions, such as Rabelaisian gusts of laughter or the trumpetings of elephants at play. Its pendulous point was not quite in line with the balance of the edifice and this peculiar characteristic was said by John Bourne's cronies to be at once the one flaw and the greatest strength in his armor. For the tip of his nose was restless; there were occasions when it moved.

"You are looking at my nose," said Mr. Bourne, with a twinkle in his eye. "Which way is it twitching?"

"To the left, sir," replied Stephen, with a broad grin.

"That means a joke coming," continued Mr. Bourne, with a sigh. "You know what my friends say: if it stays still, I'm bored; if it twitches to the left, I'm going to say something funny; if it straightens out, as it very rarely does, I'm about to step on a worm and step hard. I don't remember ever having to continue an argument after my nose straightened out. Boies,

I took up poker seriously when I was thirty-seven and gave it up forever when I was thirty-eight. Would you like to hear about it?"

"Yes, sir," replied Stephen, sitting up quickly and drawing his feet down.

"Go easy!" admonished Mr. Bourne. "There's nothing very exciting coming. It was this way. The men that I made my first big money out of were all good poker players and I hated to think there was any ground I couldn't meet them on and break even. I studied poker for six months the way some folks study golf—made a sort of religion of it. I followed it back to its dim birth in the penumbra of history and forward to the latest touch of current etiquette, and when I really knew it all I began to play. During three sittings I more than held my own, and then I began to lose, and I lost and kept on losing without a single break for a solid year, at the end of which I gave a big dinner and formally quit the game, acknowledging myself completely beaten.

"I can't remember any other incident which has given me quite such a jolt, and on that night I was the one spot of impenetrable gloom in a hilarious party. The next Saturday morning a special messenger brought me a shoe box, and in it I found the calling cards of my six

friends, a large, hard, rubber football nose guard, and a much-worn sheet of paper with a diagram on it headed in capital letters, 'JOHN BOURNE INDICATOR.' The diagram was a correct line drawing of my nose at rest, and the same nose in dotted projection lines such as we use in draughting the successive positions of a pendulum in motion. These dotted lines were labeled, 'two pairs; full house; four of a kind,' and so forth. I didn't go back, Boies. I couldn't see myself sitting in shirt sleeves and a heavy nose guard through a hot night."

The roar of laughter which followed the conclusion of this story, and in which Mr. Bourne took the major part, reverberated through the house and brought Ritt down on the run from three flights above. He rushed into the library.

"Look here, you two, how did you get together at this unearthly hour? I have always hated a morning laugh, but when I'm left out of it I hate it ten times worse. Let me in."

John Bourne glanced at the clock on the mantel, took down his feet, and hoisted himself out of the deep chair which had almost enveloped him. He stretched, yawned, and moved with a sigh toward the door.

"If you want to laugh with us," he replied, "you'll have to turn up here for dinner at seven

o'clock to-night. Good morning to both of you."

"Boies," said Ritt, "what were you doing in the library at this ungodly hour; in nothing but a bathrobe and slippers, too? Don't you know you are a guest?"

"What was your father doing here in two bathrobes?" countered Stephen.

"He reads here from six to eight almost every morning of his life," replied Bourne, "and makes the office by nine. He says he can't afford to give books the fag end of the day. That's why he gave up poker—so he could get to bed reasonably early."

"Oh no, it isn't," exclaimed Stephen.

"Isn't what?" asked Bourne.

"Why he gave up poker. He's just been telling me the true reason. That's what we were laughing about."

"Look here, Boies," said Bourne, "I hate to give away my parent so early in the game, but you might as well learn now as later that he has given at various times eighty-two explanations as to why he quit poker, no two of them the same. Your number is eighty-three."

"If that is true," said Stephen, gravely, "and if ten of his explanations are as juicy as the one he gave me, he has the most wonderful brain

ever bestowed on man. By the way, what time do you make the office?"

"I don't make it at all at present," answered Bourne. "There are two things that loom bigger than work on my horizon just now, and one of them is you. Put on your clothes. We are going to play golf."

"Not I, Ritt," said Stephen. "I've got to work."

"You're going to play golf," repeated Bourne. "Dress and chuck a little breakfast into yourself. The car will be around in half an hour. Try and remember just for an occasional moment that you are a guest or I'll turn you over to a side of my old man that you haven't met yet. Did you ever hear of his three-hour rest cure at Mike's?"

"No," said Stephen, stopping on the way to the door.

"Keep moving," said Bourne. "I can talk going upstairs. A couple of hours after his arrival they lined him up against a trainer who said, 'Straighten up, you big slob,' and punched him in what looked like the slack of his belly. To all intents and purposes the old man killed that trainer and two more immediately afterward. It wasn't fighting; it was plain stockyard slaughter—bullocks going down under an ax. They dragged them out the way you steal meat

from a tiger, and after a while the proprietor put his head in at a window and said, 'Mr. Bourne, you've made one of the few mistakes of your life—you have come to the wrong place.'"

"I'll play golf in exchange for that yarn," said Stephen, with a chuckle, "but for Heaven's sake don't make me laugh again before I eat."

On the way up the river he said out of a clear sky, "Amelie is in town; she's living in Waverley Square."

"I know," said Bourne. "I've seen her."

"You have!" exclaimed Stephen, and added, after a long pause. "Ritt, tell me something—has she bobbed her hair?"

Bourne threw back his head and laughed. "No, by cripes! she hasn't! Nor her soul."

"What's Amelie doing in that galley?"

"She isn't in it. She's one of bored thousands that have heard the rumor of a promised land where things are different and climb to the watershed to have a look into the valley of illusion. She'll never go through with it; she isn't the kind to plunge except into deep water."

"How do you know so much about my wife?" asked Stephen, sourly.

"Well," said Bourne, "I don't consider her exactly your wife at present. I've been buzzing

her around a bit to the thick, thin, and middling stuff one finds below the deadwood line."

"You have, have you? Just how far have you gone?"

"The farthest I've gone so far," replied Bourne, calmly, "was to grab her and kiss her till the blood came."

"Are you joking?" asked Stephen, turning white at the corners of his lips. "I think you must be or you couldn't imagine we were going to play golf when we get out of this car."

"I wasn't joking," said Bourne, "but I forgot to say it was my blood that flowed. You haven't noticed the thin red line that runs from my eyebrow to the corner of my jaw. She scratched me as vulgarly as a fishwife on the rampage."

"Ritt, what on earth did you do it for? Where are we with this rough stuff, anyway?"

"That's just what I wanted to find out," said Bourne. "Somebody was bound to try it sooner or later and I thought you would rather have it be me. There was another reason, of course. I wanted to show her that there are times when you can set the Thames on fire, even above tidewater. She'll never be so sure again that my blood runs all one way, and, incidentally, Boies, while her moral reflexes are still in perfect order, I believe she enjoyed the actual physical

tussle. She cried out on the beastliness, the way they always do, but you never in your life saw just such color in her cheeks or fire in her eyes. Hold on, now. Don't get excited. I'll tell you, the whole thing gave me an idea."

"Hold on yourself," interrupted Stephen. "I want to ask you something in earnest. If you had found Amelie a weak sister, would you have gone through with it?"

"That's a fool question," said Bourne, "and I suppose you think it's a trouble maker. The answer is, yes; but you and I have known all along that Amelie isn't of that sorority. She isn't woman in the gutter; she's woman on the warpath, and if you know of any unfair advantage we can take of her, now is the time to take it, old boy. All this talk of the weaker sex makes me tremble for the future of man. Women can outsuffer, outlive, outlie, and outfool us by the four points of the compass. Their endurance is phenomenal; their perseverance along fixed lines is a devastation. Their name used to be mud and now it's wildfire."

"I can say amen to that," said Stephen. "Now what are you going to do about it?"

"There are three ways to stop a runaway horse," answered Bourne, after a moment's thought. "One is by the curb, another is by

cracking him between the ears with the butt of your crop, and the third is by rolling off, wrapping yourself around his forelegs, and dying with him. Think it out."

"I have," said Stephen. "And my conclusion is that your time is overdue. God send you a wife—any old wife. I've got such a thirst for matrimony and the aftermath for you that I'd willingly lose this golf match to see you hooked. You said you had an idea. What is it?"

"You're going to lose the golf match, anyway," replied Bourne, "and the idea will keep while I prove it."

His prediction was fulfilled, but during the long ride home the two friends did not resume their attack on absent woman; they held their fire until after dinner, when John Bourne was present to balance the scales of justice. His son started the ball rolling with a leading question:

"Father, what do *you* think is the matter with women?"

"Nothing," replied the elder Bourne, promptly. "Nothing is the matter with them."

His son stared at him and waited. "If that's really all you've got to say on the subject, Boies and I will go up to the garret and talk to Uncle Eli's Buddha idol."

John Bourne's eyes twinkled and then steadied

to a straightforward gaze. "Don't rush me," he said. "If you mean from my point of view I should say that a matter of a generation is what's wrong with women. But if you mean from the viewpoint of your callow years, I say that you get what you deserve. There's nothing more extraordinary in the history of civilization than the compliance of woman to the will of man. When nations have demanded Spartans among their women, they have found them; when they have asked for mollusks, mollusks become a glut in the open market."

He stopped speaking as though to give the full meaning of his words a chance to sink in, but evidently expected no interruption from his hearers and presently continued: "My generation asked a great deal of woman and got it. We didn't give much in return beyond an ordered life and a high average of fidelity. We were busy with a forward movement and it kept most of us out of mischief and many of us in love. You may think that that forward movement is still on, but it isn't. As a nation we have reached the dangerous age, the years of acquisition. Think of your aunts, how near they seem to you, and then remember that my aunt used to go to a farm somewhere around Bleecker Street for eggs, and when she wanted a long gallop in the

country she used to ride out here to Murray Hill. That's the measure of the great movement, whether you apply it to Broadway or the whole West, and already, by your faces, I can see that it seems incredible to you. Your generation is stagnant, slack water at the high tide of material prosperity; but more to be pitied than blamed. We did it to you."

"I don't think you're fair to us, sir," said Boies, taking up the cudgels heatedly. "Or to yourself. You're a traitor to your best years. Take the last ten of them; as a surgeon of industry, you have done more tangible good to more people than any king that ever lived."

A sudden smile lightened John Bourne's heavy features. "That came from the heart, Boies," he said, "and I thank you; but your legal mind slipped a cog. I never said that industry isn't forging ahead, running neck and neck with the progression of mechanism; I grant all that. What I refuse to concede is that the caliber of our division of humanity continues at the old standard. A people that builds bridges to cross rivers is bound to be greater than the people that builds them to sell. Do you get that?"

"Yes, sir," said Stephen, thoughtfully, "that's a true saying; but what are you going to do

when all your rivers are bridged? Is every nation bound downhill from the day it ceases to move and becomes acquisitive, as you put it? Are you that much of a pessimist?"

"I'm not a pessimist, an altruist, or a faddist of any other variety," said John Bourne, quickly. "I'm a cleaner of my own and other men's stables of fortune. That's my job. To be an industrial engineer just at this epoch seems to me the happiest of all destinies. As you inferred, I'm a curer of many ills, most of them little, and I'm as happy as a village general practitioner with one mare and a radius of thirty miles of country to his practice. But all that doesn't prevent my standing on the handiest hillock and reading the signs of the times. The soul of even the meanest people dies hard because it invariably feeds on the illusion of national regeneration. If it weren't for that undying aspiration, man could never forget his own ruins."

"Boies," said Ritt, "what do you and I get out of all this? The assurance that we young folks have been demanding facile women and are getting them, and that our generation also inaugurates the æon of senile decay in the nation. I haven't carried a load like that since I was a Sophomore. I say the innuendo as far as

Amelie is concerned is more than an insult; it's dead wrong."

"I don't suppose you were even thinking of Amelie, Mr. Bourne," said Stephen, "but were you heading for her?"

John Bourne's brilliant eyes shifted quickly from one young man to the other.

"It's hard to keep up with your age," he said, as though he were feeling his way. "I can't get used to the use of names. What I mean is that I remember the abstract as a code among gentlemen, but since you have named her, I can say this. I wish Amelie were here, sitting in that fourth chair as gravely as she used to sit on my knee a good twenty years ago. If she were sitting here among us, all three of us her friends, I would feel differently about talking of her and with her. I could ask her what was really the matter and somehow I believe she'd tell me frankly how bored she was with looking out of windows into windows; of bringing up children to anything as empty as a universal rule of acquisition. She might even go deeper and sound the overwhelming monotony of materialism unrelieved by crime and of the dead weight of honorable deportment without the threat of hell fire."

He paused and leaned forward, fixing his eyes

on Stephen, who was listening tensely with both mind and ears.

"If she were here," he continued, "I might talk to her and play on you, Boies, so that you would feel in your breast the birth, the warmth, the heat, and the roar of the undying fire; the stirring of those elemental emotions which are not the whole of love, but the eternal setting of love. Life is flame, conflagration—or a heap of ashes. I wonder if you've ever thought *that* out. There's really no middle ground. Either we burn or are of the dead."

Stephen nodded his head, but did not interrupt. John Bourne paused and then continued: "You can't put too much emphasis on keeping alive. It's the one great excuse for fanaticism and rebellion; faith, doubt, and even destruction. Why, I've seen many an alliance, many a friendship, and many a healthy feud go dead for lack of a little intelligent kindling. Haven't you?"

Stephen nodded again. Ritt glanced at his father and smiled with appreciation and pride. John Bourne shot a quick, measuring look at each of them.

"I like a certain class of murderers," he declared, belligerently. "My heart warms to the great swindlers of history; I bow down to all

colossal squanderers of vital treasure. So do you, so do all of us in our secret hearts. Why? Because the outlaw represents the great revulsions, the war of man's spirit on monotony, the high flights of one individual's leaping imagination toward the consuming sun. God's curse on all quitters, on all accepters of fate, on all those who prefer the estate of dead wood to growing-pains, and ignoble peace to any kind of suffering. There you are. Perhaps that may help you to sympathize with Amelie, to catch just a glimmering—a guess—at where and why she stands."

Chapter Five

BOIES STEPHEN lay awake far into the night, but he was not restless. He sensed an exhilaration which defied fatigue. What liquor does for some natures a mental problem did for his. He could remember almost word for word everything John Bourne had said and he was conscious of a surge of gratitude that the admonition had here been buried so deep beneath an obvious surface, there lifted to so high though speculative a plane. He felt a lump rise in his throat at the memory of the light, sure touch with which an image of Amelie had been drawn into the intimate circle, as if in protection not of her rights alone, but of all those traditions of deference which Americans have been wont to accord to their women.

As he lay wide eyed upon the bed he could conjure vividly the Amelie of twenty years ago, perched on John Bourne's knee. He could picture the long, slim lines of her black-stockinged legs, the gravity of her big brown eyes, the spots of color in her dusky cheeks, the curly disorder of her living hair. Then, quite suddenly, the vision faded into a nearer reality and he saw the Amelie of to-day, joining them, sinking

slowly into the vacant chair, attending with the selfsame gravity the conference of her assembled judges, watching them, weighing them from within that hidden fortress of the quickening soul which he had never been quite man enough to take by assault and to hold. He dropped off to sleep with a questioning smile on his lips and awoke to find Ritt and a flood of sunlight in his room.

"Boies, are you awake? Wake up! Get up! This is to be a great day for you, old top. Roll out and bump yourself on the floor."

"You remind me of a kid that wants to go fishing," said Stephen as he stretched himself sleepily.

"That's extraordinary!" cried Bourne. "It's wonderful, telepathic! That's exactly what we are going to do. Get up and put on your rough togs."

"Nothing like that," said Stephen, fully awake. "I'm going to the office."

"You are not," said Bourne, promptly. "I telephoned your old office yesterday and told them you wouldn't be in for weeks, and, God's truth, Boies, they said they were delighted."

"Weeks!" cried Stephen. "You're crazy."

"That's just a formula for telling a man he lives," replied Bourne. "I like it. Try and

catch the fever. Get up. This morning you're going fishing and to-night you start on the longest journey of your life. Boies, I've got something up my sleeve. Are you too sleepy to get that?"

Within an hour they were on their way and Stephen was at the wheel of the powerful touring car. Under Bourne's direction they were sweeping smoothly toward those Connecticut hills which stop short of the Berkshires but are still well beyond the congested suburban area of the metropolis. For four hours they traveled on improved highways; then they turned into a clay road which stretched its long silence along the fronded reaches of a purling brook.

Finally Bourne said: "Get ready to throw her into second. Turn to the left when I say so and turn sharp. There's a little bridge and then you climb the wall of heaven."

He had scarcely stopped speaking when he cried out the order. Stephen caught sight of the little bridge just in time, but there was a look of dismay on his face as he swung the car wide, turned it sharply, and drove it across the rattling timbers into a drooping mask of encroaching foliage. The hood of the car shed the branches to right and left and the engine rose suddenly to a sharp angle of ascent.

"Change your gears!" shouted Bourne. "We don't want to stick here."

Stephen obeyed quickly, changed to second and then to first. The whirling wheels cut through the incrusting moss of the ruts of a wood road and took a grip on the rock foundation that lies close to the surface of every New England hill. The car shot forward and began a long, grinding climb, mounting along curves and by sharp rises and short dips to higher and higher levels. The steady whir of the engine seemed a noise clean cut and separate from the wide blanket of silence of the surrounding wilderness. The closely interlaced second-growth forest presented an apparent barrier which nevertheless opened steadily in a restricted arch as though to guide the noisy interloper deep into its fastnesses before overwhelming commotion with a triumphant stillness.

The car came out on a plateau, relatively flat but still thickly wooded. The character of the soil changed, and with it the nature of the trees. The road descended, turned sharply, and ended quite abruptly almost under the eaves of a log cabin built on a bold promontory of rock which hung above a dark pool. On one side a group of large hickories shaded the spot; on the other the gaze fell away by descending terraces of

matted brier patches, blots of juniper, and a sea of autumn-painted foliage, until it caught the blue glint of far-away water. With the stopping of the engine a pulsing quiet repossessed the scene.

Bourne left the car and led the way to the cabin. It had a porch, a sort of gallery running the full length of its front, sturdily roofed with logs and clapboarded above. He turned and waited for Stephen, who approached slowly, as though he needed time to absorb the peculiar impression of so unexpected a conclusion to the long ride; then he pointed out the strange shape of the deep tarn, almost circular at one end, with a long, narrow arm reaching toward the north.

"Long Leg Hole is the name of this place," he said, after a moment's pause. "There are a lot of these freak ponds on the tops of Connecticut hills, but this is the only really attractive one I know. It's deep, too, and the old man has stocked it with lazy carp. He owns two hundred acres of the scrub around here; he says it makes a wall just soft and thick enough. Come inside."

They entered, and for half an hour Stephen said not a word; he was taken up with enumerating the almost countless touches of an inexpert hand bending to the homely uses of comfort and

convenience such materials as could be come by readily in so secluded a spot. The rush-seated chairs, the boards for floor and shelving, the dulled kitchen utensils, and the simple chinaware had been transported from some near-by town; but the awkward construction of tables, cupboards, and a couch, the rough stone and mortar of the huge fireplace, of the outside chimney and many kindred features, proclaimed the handicraft of an amateur brought face to face with necessity and conquering.

The place was musty, but only faintly so, for fabrics were absent from its furnishings and there was little within its four walls to gather dust or create mold. Its larder was well stocked with such staples as do not readily spoil—sugar, salt, cereals in packets, tinned vegetables and meats, and a long row of bottled preserves. While Stephen was looking these over Bourne disappeared, and presently returned from the car bearing two large baskets of provisions which he heaped unceremoniously on the one big bed.

"What's the idea?" asked Stephen, curiously. "Are you and I going to live here?"

"No," said Bourne. "I'm not, anyway. There's a chunky boat lying around somewhere. We'll go fishing for a while and then beat it for home. I'd like to take J. E. a carp or two just

so he'll know we've been here without my having to talk about it. Soon after my mother died he disappeared for a couple of months and gave us a lot of worry. He came up here and built this place mostly with his own hands. I can't tell you very well what he did it for, and I don't suppose he could, either, because since it was finished he has hardly ever come out here. He made a half-hearted effort to explain the business to me once, but he didn't finish. He didn't have to. Somehow I knew, without being actually told, why he did it. It was an overpowering impulse, a reaching out for something basic like a foundation. I can't tell you in words any more than he could me, but I felt it, all right. In building a house with his own hands J. E. was just rebuilding himself after an earthquake."

When they were ready to start for home Stephen suggested that he be relieved at the wheel, but Bourne refused.

"Boies," he said, "I want you to drive because you've got to know this road and know it well. Did the old man's talk get you last night? Have you thought it over?"

"It did and I certainly have," replied Stephen. "If what he said hadn't been holding me in a sort of puzzled trance, do you think you could have run me into a jaunt of this kind and fooled

around with mysterious suggestions and groceries without bringing down an avalanche of questions on your busy head? Come on, now, just what is the game?"

During half the long ride back to town Bourne expounded, expostulated, and pleaded; during the other half the two friends sat in a purposeful silence which was almost as intense as the argument that had preceded it. Stephen's eyes were fixed unswervingly on the road; he seemed to be rising slowly but steadily toward one of those decisions which, once taken, project a lasting implication throughout the rest of life. A peculiar expression that was half smile and half light of battle gradually spread across his features.

"All right, Ritt," he said at last. "I'm on." His lips set grimly as he added: "Only, don't think I'm going into this for a lark. I'm not. I'm in earnest, in the deadest earnest I've felt since my first fight at school; and if there's any doubt in your mind or anything yellow in your plans, back out right now. Quit me while I'm cold, but don't try it after my blood's up. I mean it."

Bourne caught his friend's elbow in a firm grip and pressed it, but he said nothing. Before returning to the house in Murray Hill they ran the

car into a garage, replenished gas and oil, filled the grease-cups, and lubricated the springs; then they drove to a chauffeur's outfitting establishment, where Stephen made several purchases, among them a dark-green khaki uniform, a visored cap, and an enormous pair of dust goggles. Half an hour later they were at home and Boies was listening to Bourne's end of a telephone conversation with Amelie.

"No, I don't feel especially cowardly, because I'm not a coward. You are the coward. . . . That's all nonsense! You're just as strong as I am. A ride—a tearing ride into the October country. There's a chill in the air that sets your blood to racing and a burst of color on the hillsides that makes your heart ache. We'll start now or whenever you say; in an hour or two hours or when the moon rises. . . . You wouldn't swallow freedom if it climbed in through a yawn and went to sleep in your throat. . . . You're *not* playing with fire; you're just hiding in a hole the way a dog does when he knows his day is finished. . . . I'll promise nothing. . . . Yes, there will be a driver if you say so. . . . All right."

He hung up the receiver and turned toward Stephen with a gesture of finality. "We're in for it," he said. "You'll have to cough a lot and have a bad cold. It isn't really chilly enough for

a high-collared coat, and as for those big goggles, they are an anachronism; they don't go with oiled macadam roads. Amelie isn't a fool."

Stephen snapped his fingers. "If you've got your lines half learned," he said, "and don't fall all over yourself, Amelie isn't going to worry a lot about whether your driver has a cold or the smallpox. When do we start?"

"We've got a couple of hours for a bath and a bit of a rest. How do you feel? You've done a stiff lot of driving already. Shall I try to put it off till to-morrow?"

"No!" shouted Stephen and made for his room.

Two hours later almost to the minute they were at the apartment in Waverley Square. Without a glance at his driver, Bourne hurried in and up, and did not return before he had engaged Amelie in an animated discussion. He let her climb unaided into the car and sprang in beside her.

"But I tell you you're wrong," he exclaimed as the car started smoothly away. "A man can pull almost any woman down; he can never raise one up. You never want to be improved, not one of you. The thought that there's room for improvement is one that no lover ever dare harbor; to any woman it's proof positive that his love is on the wane, and she's right, by Jove! But that's neither here nor there. I'm

not talking from a tank of hot air, but from the strangest and newest reservoir of statistics that was ever collected to show one thing and proved another."

"What reservoir are you thinking about?" asked Amelie.

"The researches of the motion-picture industry," replied Bourne. "Don't yawn. It won't take me more than a minute to tell you. Those chaps have begun to systematize results. They want to know what the public really wants. There isn't a drop of æstheticism to a hogshead of their blood. They have found out that the greatest pictures from a point of technic or difficulty in production are small in the eyes of the box office, and that the most stupendous educational film ever shot will hold men, but never an audience of women, and of course women are their great source of revenue. Women aren't only impatient of improvement, of any broadening that isn't absorbed without conscious effort; they are inherently vicious."

"Because they don't care whether they learn or not how a flower unfolds," murmured Amelie, "or how a turbine turbs, or why a snowflake falls or sparks fly up, that proves them inherently vicious, does it?"

"Not at all," said Bourne. "What proves

them so is that woman in the mob admits only one current in life; only one, mind you—sex. Not presented in a grossly vulgar way, but insidiously. When she is most natural she has just the one hunger, the one demand."

"That's a lie," said Amelie.

"It may be a lie to you as an individual," said Bourne, calmly, "and at this special stage of your development, but it isn't a lie in the face of the average mean of womanhood."

Amelie made a quick movement toward him. "I admit it," she said. "Women are vile; they are low without knowing it, which is as low as you can get. But if you don't mind, Ritt, I would so much rather talk about something else. When you said over the phone, 'a tearing ride into the October country,' I gulped, I almost cried. If you had been there I might even have thrown my arms around your neck."

"Why, Amelie!" cried Bourne, drawing close to her, "what's come over you? Are you really human under your skin?"

"No, nothing like that. Please don't. It's so hard for me to remember how really noble man is when Ritt Bourne makes love to Boies Stephen's wife. And you have never even bothered to ask me why I did it!"

"Oh, Amelie," said Bourne, "don't let's

bother about all that. Please sit close, please be a pal, please let's hold hands like two kids out for a treat. It isn't silly, truly it isn't."

"But where's the meaning in it?" asked Amelie, earnestly. "Why should I do it if I don't feel like doing it? How long have you been in love with me?"

"I'm not in love with you."

"Then why do you try to hold my hand and kiss me and do things like that when I don't want you to?"

"I'll tell you why," said Bourne, after a moment's thought. "Do you remember as a youngster ever coming on a cat or a dog or a porcupine or a snake or a rabbit asleep? What was your natural impulse? To wake them up every time. That's an instinct with everybody: some nasty people get a regular lick when they see somebody else asleep."

"Well?" said Amelie.

"That's all," said Bourne. "I find, after thinking I knew you for years, that you've been sound asleep all the time. You were wound up to walk and talk, but nobody has ever touched the spring that will make your blood leap like a mad thing and hammer at your temples till it deafens you. You are a sort of lovely doll with genuine human hair."

"Isn't your driver going awfully fast?" asked Amelie, suddenly.

"Don't worry," answered Bourne. "He's a good driver if he isn't good at anything else."

"And you think," continued Amelie, returning to the subject of herself, "that a man who doesn't love a woman, who doesn't even lie about it, can make her blood leap like that?"

"I know it," said Bourne. "A man's attraction for any grown woman doesn't hang on whether he's in love with her, or on whether he's noble or mean, young or old, rich or poor. It depends entirely on whether he's positive to her negative in a highly charged physical battery. If he is and has the patience to wait, God help her! The more of a cad he turns out the farther she'll go."

"Ritt," said Amelie, "you are horribly wrong, and even if you aren't, you are wrong. I'll have to explain that, I suppose. What I mean is that all this scientific popular knowledge of physical impulses is more than depressing. It doesn't lead clean even when it's accurate; it debases. It's as though you pulled women to pieces not to find their strength, but their flaws. Women can't afford to be pulled to pieces. They know it. They must be taken whole and held whole or they crumple up—like that!"

She closed her hand into a tight ball and then threw it open with a gesture of abandonment. "I won't let you or any man," she concluded, "make love to me as a matter of technic."

"Then you are the loser," said Bourne. "Now just give the making of love as an abstract game a chance. Don't sit in an enemy camp and shoot arrows at me. How can I talk to you and reach you when you are so far away? Come closer; yield just a little. Let yourself go just far enough to see into my country. Think of my arm around you not as a contact, but as a symbol of warmth. I tell you I've never yet made love to you. Nobody ever has. Trust me. Close your eyes."

"How can I," said Amelie, impatiently, "when this car is making fifty miles on the clear and sixty on the turns? Speak to the driver or I'll get out and walk—and for Heaven's sake, don't talk so loud!"

"The driver's all right," said Bourne, nervously. "We'll just have to get used to him. He's slow as molasses in everything else, but when he gets in a car he has to have a stiff breeze to breathe. Don't think about him."

"Where are we?" demanded Amelie. "We're miles and miles from town already. Where are we going?"

"I don't know," replied Bourne. "Why worry? Didn't I promise you a tearing ride into October country? And October is the king month, a man's month. Champagne and a queen's crown for April, but October is a vintage Burgundy, monarch of wines, food and drink for the grown soul. April is amber seen through water, youngsters' spring kisses; but October is the heart's blood of the year."

"It's extraordinary," murmured Amelie, "the way a man's talk improves when his friend's wife is living on her own. There, take my hand. I feel better because I know the worst; this car can't possibly go any faster if it tries, and, incidentally, thank God for headlights. Now tell me the reason of rack and ruin. I'll close my eyes."

"The reason of rack and ruin?" repeated Bourne and paused. "I think I know what you mean," he went on. "You wonder why nowadays our world, yours and mine, seems to make only to break. I'll tell you if you'll only lie still. It's a question of mechanism. Anyday laborer can marry happily; they do it by millions. But the moment you get into the industrial class you begin to find here and there the seed of unhappiness, and when you pass up to people who live purely on their nerves that miserable seed seems to have been sown broadcast."

"That's true," said Amelie. "But why?"

"This is why," continued Bourne. "A lot of forces outside of man have combined toward the mechanical refining of women. If he alone had built up the intricacies of the modern woman he might have the touch of the master at his fingers' ends and be able to handle the machine, make it run smoothly without knowing it was running. But unluckily for all of us, his finesse hasn't kept up with the growth of nervous tension. It went to sleep at the stage of the pick handle as an answer to the flying frying pan."

"I'll admit all that," said Amelie. "Really, Ritt, you're wonderful, and I never knew it before! Now what's the way out?"

"The long way out," replied Bourne, undaunted, "is for man to stay up nights learning finesse. That's theoretical and applies to the future of the genus as a whole. But taking any individual case, I should say there's only one way to get results in time and that is to open up any given woman with an ax, pick out all the tiny wheels, springs, gadgets, and dewflickers that aren't essential to her elemental functioning, and throw them in the family ash can. I'll tell you why I believe that; I mean believe it in dead earnest, with all my heart."

"Yes," said Amelie, "go on. I'm feeling what you say, Ritt; I really am."

"I've known of two or three cases," complied Bourne, "where men with butterfly wives have gone to smash and dropped clean out of view, and once myself, and the other times somebody else, came across those ruins and found a live young tree of content. Their women had reverted to every basic trait that tends to sane building. They had been swept clean of furbelows to their foundations, and the foundations were solid, by God! There are the thousand times when butterflies have quit cold on disaster, and added shame to it, but the one woman who doesn't fills my eyes so full that I can't see the rest."

The car slowed down violently with a long-drawn screech of the brakes, swerved, turned, rattled across a groaning bridge, and plunged with a swish into a bank of foliage. The driver changed speeds with a horrible grinding of the gears that shattered the silence of the night. Amelie did not scream; she gasped and seized Bourne's arm with both hands.

"What is it?" she asked, in a hoarse whisper. "What has happened?"

"Nothing," replied Bourne, reassuringly. "Nothing at all. Don't be frightened. Look

at the light on the leaves. Did you ever see a more wonderful effect?"

The car jounced along the ruts of the wood road, ground down into them, and seemed to take a grip on one rock only to leap with a bone-racking jerk to another. Gradually it steadied down and began to climb up and up. All about it was an impenetrable darkness, crowding close upon the vivid illumination pouring upward from the headlights.

"Ritt," cried Amelie, suddenly, "I *am* frightened. Where are we? Where are you taking me?"

He did not answer. She waited breathlessly, but still he did not speak.

Her body, held closely in the crook of his arm, began to tremble as with an ague. All the poise of the finished woman deserted her by visible layers, leaving her more and more natural, naked and stripped of veneer. Her teeth chattered; her lips grew parched; they ached with dryness. She wet them with her tongue. Bourne felt the pounding of her heart against his breast. He put his face close to hers.

"Amelie," he asked, "are you awake? Have you really begun to feel? Has your blood started running uphill?"

"I don't know what you mean," stammered

Amelie. "I only know that I'm not a coward—not really a coward." A lump rose in her throat. She fought it down. "I'm not a coward," she said again and again; and with each repetition her body stiffened, grew slowly vibrant as a strung cord.

The car stopped. Bourne lifted her out. Her limbs, all her body, were rigid, yet quivering as to one supreme, desperate, and transcending effort.

"Boies!" she screamed, full throated, pouring the whole sum of herself, the last drop of her pent-up strength, into the cry.

"I'm here, Amelie," said Stephen, hoarsely. He turned violently toward Bourne. "Damn you," he whispered through white lips, "give her to me!"

Chapter Six

STEPHEN held his wife tightly in his arms. He watched Bourne turn in unsmiling panic, spring into the car, seize the wheel with nervous hands, and whirl the machine around with a reckless disregard for rocks, stumps, or the near-by cliff. He stood quite still, listening while the whir of the engine drew swiftly away and died, leaving behind it a profound silence. Then, gradually, he became conscious of a movement or a throbbing sound. It was Amelie's heart beating furiously against his side with a staccato, interrupted rhythm that had a choke in it like a sob. She clung to him with both hands as though, but for her desperate grip, her body would slip to the ground.

He held her still more closely, and presently she shuddered and began to weep unrestrainedly. The tears poured down her cheeks; she cried with a will, a whole-heartedness which surpassed in tensity any outburst of her childhood; and while she cried she burrowed her wet face deeper and deeper into his coat. He petted her on the back and marveled at the nearness, warmth, and mobility of her flesh. It seemed to him that

never before had she been so near to him, so hovering on the brink of total possession.

Such moments of unbridled emotion plunge immediately toward fulfillment of the heart's desire or they suffer an abrupt reaction. Stephen was too dazed or too unbelieving of his good fortune to press while the luck was with him; but even if he had realized his opportunity he might still have let it pass, intent as he was on a sweeping readjustment, a complete understanding and its consequent rebuilding. He had heard most of the talk between his wife and Bourne, and while at the first the situation had amused even though it filled him with rage, it had ended by arousing in him all the elemental passions of the genuinely jealous male. When he had demanded Amelie of Bourne he had been ripe for combat, so ripe that, had he been armed, he might have shot his friend and felt at the moment not the slightest compunction. The same temper was still in his mood; he was seeking no compromises.

He let Amelie finish her cry and when he felt her slowly pulling herself together he almost welcomed the change. Finally she drew free of his arms, fished out an inadequate pocket handkerchief, and started to dab her eyes; then from the silk bag dangling on her arm she took a vanity case and by the light of the newly risen

moon prepared to powder her nose. Stephen reached forward, took the case from her, not hastily, but firmly, and threw it far from him. It fell with a splash in the pond.

"You won't need that here," he said, quietly.

Amelie measured him with leveled eyes. She had been wearing no hat and her disheveled hair stood out about her head like a filmy nimbus. She raised her hand slowly and laid it over her heart, as though, quite independently of the matters which held her thoughts, she were curious at its continued rapid beating.

"So," she said, finally, "you and Mr. Bourne laid a trap for me, such a trap as would fit a chorus girl."

Stephen met her gaze fairly. "The most skillful and ornate traps in the world," he said, "have always been laid for chorus girls; but without flattery I wouldn't have picked this setting to snare the best of them. Come into the house."

"I'm not coming into the house," said Amelie. "I'm not going to stay here with you. I don't know you."

"Suit yourself," said Stephen, indifferently. "You'll find it a long walk through the woods, but there's only the one road."

He left her, went into the cabin, lit a lamp, sat down, and waited. Only half an hour elapsed

before she appeared in the doorway, but he had had ample time to formulate his plans. He did not move. She took a tentative step into the room and waited, but still he paid her no heed.

"Well?" she asked.

When she spoke he looked up and stared at her from a strange detachment. He had never before thought of her as satisfyingly beautiful except to his own eyes, but the woman before him would have struck a resounding chord of response in almost any man. She had lost or forgotten the cold security of demeanor which the Amelie he knew best had worn like a suit of daily armor. Still, she did not appear defenseless; her charms had merely come to breathing life, pressed to the surface, taken possession of her.

"Get ready something to eat," said Stephen, "and after that you can dig out the linen and make up the bed."

"Boies, are you joking?" asked Amelie, the spots of color in her cheeks deepening.

"No," said Stephen, "I'm not joking. I've been working for you for seven years; you have been under the illusion that you were working for me. Now you're going to learn the difference between bored bossing around of a bunch of maids and plain, everyday, productive labor.

You're going to work until your back aches, and the sooner you make up your mind to it the better for both of us."

Amelie gave him a long look, dropped her hands to her sides, and turned slowly toward the door. Stephen leaped to his feet, reached it before her, and slammed it shut. Then he turned and faced her. His eyes shone with such a glint as she had never before seen in them. His eyebrows twitched spasmodically, but his jaw was not trembling; it was set firmly in a square, forward line.

"Amelie," he said, hoarsely, "listen to me. I've never in my life talked to you as I'm going to talk now. I want you to believe me when I tell you that you're going to do as I say or I am going to kill you. I'm glad you don't laugh at that, Amelie, because if you did I would show you. I couldn't take a whip to you or my fists. I couldn't do that; I've thought it out. I couldn't raise welts on you, bruise you, make you ugly, or do anything that stops halfway. But you know my hands, Amelie, how strong they are, and if you don't turn around and get to work, by God above us! I'll put my fingers around your throat and that will be the end, Amelie, the absolute, peaceful, eternal end!"

They looked at each other intently, their

eyes narrowed, their breasts heaving, their fists tightly clenched.

"Boies," said Amelie, finally, almost in a whisper, "why do you say that? I believe you; but why do you feel like that?"

"Because I'm tired of all half rations," answered Boies; "because I refuse to join the majority; because life after a break-up wouldn't leave me whole, and I refuse to be a walking sepulcher. That's one side of it. The other is that you're my woman. Nothing can change that; you can't change it and live. I knew it, but I didn't realize it, take in the whole truth of it, until I heard Ritt Bourne making love to you, to my woman. Now get to work."

For a moment Amelie continued to look at him. A slow smile crept into her eyes and then to the corners of her mouth. She turned from his stern visage, still carrying that smile, and went to the baskets Bourne had left there in the morning. She paused over one which contained toilet articles for herself, plain cotton night-gowns and a couple of gingham aprons; examined its contents curiously; put on one of the aprons; and then set the basket aside. She carried the parcels by armfuls and arranged them on the shelves in the corner of the great room which served as pantry, dining hall, and kitchen.

Then she set the table for one, lit the small oil range, put on a skillet, and began to cook.

Long after the resulting odors had made his question unnecessary Stephen asked, "What are you cooking?"

"Ham and eggs," answered Amelie.

"I don't want ham and eggs," said Stephen. "Cook something else."

The smile at the corners of her mouth trembled and died. She dropped the knife with which she was turning the ham with a clatter to the floor and started to untie her apron.

"Eat ham and eggs," she said, with a dull finality, "or kill me whenever you get ready."

"I beg your pardon," said Stephen, hastily. "I was wrong. I'll eat ham and eggs."

Amelie looked across at him with a last doubting but defiant flash. "And you'll fetch the water and keep me in kindling and wood. Real men have always done that." She stood waiting for his answer, as though her new world hung on it.

"All right," said Stephen, after a long pause, his eyes wandering in a pretended search for the wood box. "I'll fetch the water and light the oil stove for you in the mornings."

Amelie turned her head to stare at the blue-flame range, bit her lip, and then very slowly

resumed her smile and her cooking. She warmed a plate and the bread and presently told him in an unnaturally subdued voice that supper was ready. He arose and took the single place set at the table without remark. She stood at his shoulder, sliced his bread and poured his water. The despised ham and eggs were consumed with apparent relish, but in silence. When the meal was over he went to the door, threw it open, drew a chair into the chill air, and lit his pipe. Behind him he could hear Amelie preparing something for herself, eating, and then clearing things away, and afterward making the bed.

He was very tired; he had driven over three hundred miles since early morning and he welcomed the thought of going to bed, but before he could put it into execution he fell sound asleep in the big chair in which he sat. Amelie spoke to him coldly, asking him to let her pass, and, when he did not answer, stood for a moment in hesitation as to whether she should initiate another battle for her rights. Then she saw that he was really asleep, stepped carefully over his legs, went out on the gallery, and finally descended to the rock and sat down by the water's edge.

The moon was high in the heavens. By its light she could study at leisure the details of the

cabin and all its surroundings. They were pleasant to the eye; they attracted her. She began to feel a drowsy well-being, arose hurriedly by an effort of the will, slipped back quietly into the house, undressed, and put out the lamp. As she slipped between the fresh sheets she was conscious of a playful selfishness; she had the big bed all to herself.

When she awoke it was morning and Stephen and his chair were both gone from the doorway, which was still wide open. The bed was so placed that she could look out across the platform of rock directly in front of the cabin to a single gnarled pine which clung to the very verge of the pool, its roots fastened like clamps around the weathered edges of the granite and piercing it wherever they could find a crevice. Beside the black trunk of the tree stood in startling contrast the figure of Stephen, erect, poised like an arrow on a taut bowstring. The stocky impression he gave when he had his clothes on was subtly modified by their absence. His stripped body was a thing of beauty; it tapered in sweeping, diminishing curves from broad shoulders to narrow hips and from hips to ankles.

He raised his arms very slowly until, fingers touching, they made a Gothic point above his head. Beneath him the dark pool had been

transformed to a misty cloud of gray; fog hung tenaciously to its surface in the face of the rising sun and here and there cast up a wisp or a plume, as though inviting and daring the bather. His body inclined rigidly forward like a falling tree, shot out, and plunged from sight.

Amelie drew a long, quivering breath. In the hushed morning stillness she could hear the swirl of the strokes of the unseen swimmer growing fainter and fainter as he struck straight out from shore. She imagined with a terrifying intensity the feel of the chill water on his warm and active limbs. She envied him. Never before had she felt so strange and sensuous a desire for an inanimate contact. It seemed to her that, above all other desires, she wanted to feel her body, herself, free of all tramelings, immersed in the open water, cutting its stilly surface with the stroke of a white arm that should drip jewels in her upturned face. No need for clammy bathing suit and confining rubber cap!

She sighed, then caught her breath, slipped from the bed and in her cotton nightgown, pink-footed, picked her way gingerly to the edge of the cliff, laid her hand on the rough trunk of the pine tree for support, and stood in comical, childlike hesitation, rubbing the calf of her left leg with the arch of her right foot. The fingers of her

free hand played with the buttons at her neck and slowly unfastened them. She exposed one shoulder and stared at its smooth curve, paling so quickly beneath the kiss of the morning air. She pulled the gown down a little farther and with lips quaintly pursed examined the effect on her other arm. A breeze arose as if to a challenge, stirred the hair lying loose upon her back, flapped the skirts of the nightdress, and incidentally swept the fog neatly from the face of the waters.

"Amelie!" roared a genuinely shocked voice. "Put on your clothes! Get back to bed!"

She caught the folds of the gown to her bosom with both hands; tears of disappointment rose to her eyes. She felt no shame, but as she turned and made her way slowly back to the cabin she grew grave with wonder at the new spirit, the elf, the stranger, that had possessed her body. She went to the inadequate mirror and stared at her reflection. The face she saw was known and unknown; suddenly it smiled at her. Her inner soul beheld that smile with amazement and promptly hurried away from it, absorbed but a little frightened.

When Stephen entered he made no mention of the incident beside the pool, but he stared at Amelie for a moment with a blank quizzical

look such as one might bestow on a tadpole hovering at the brink of frogdom. She glanced at him quite coolly. She was fully dressed and aproned, and seemed to him and to herself to have gone through a complete change of identity since the juvenile scene of only half an hour before. She had done her hair very neatly and, though neither of them realized it, this simple little fact alone implied an entire cycle of psychological phenomena. Once more woman had succeeded in squaring the circle and was back again at normal.

"Good morning," said Stephen, shortly, out of his suddenly acquired wisdom.

"*Good* morning," replied Amelie.

"I don't mind your eating with me," he continued in the voice of an assumed concession. "Hurry things along. We're going fishing."

Amelie paused in her work for a moment as though she were considering a crucial point with proper deliberation; finally she set the table for two, broke two more eggs, and presently announced breakfast.

"It's ham and eggs again," she said, apologetically, "but perhaps it will be fish for dinner."

They ate in silence, and while she washed the dishes Stephen busied himself with preparing two of the half dozen long bamboo fishing poles

with which the cabin was stocked, and with an excursion in search of worms, grasshoppers, and a few small frogs. As soon as he was ready he led the way to the flat-bottomed boat and took the oars. Amelie, wearing a broad-brimmed garden hat which she had discovered in her thorough overhauling of the premises, sat in the stern, staring with anticipatory horror at the squirming assortment of bait promiscuously tangled in the bottom of a large glass jar. Stephen sent the boat along over the smooth surface of the water with long lazy strokes; both of them filled their eyes with the glory of the autumnal woods under the slanting morning light.

They dropped the stone anchor just off the mouth of the straight narrow reach which had inspired the name of Long Leg Hole. Stephen baited his hook with a live frog, made a cast, and swept the luckless animal in leaping, simulated jerks around a wide arc; drew him in, cast again, and repeated the performance. There came a sudden rush, a swirl; the frog disappeared. The long pole bent in a graceful, vibrant curve; its tip dipped into the water. He raised his arms, drove the hook home with a skillful modulated pull, and then steadily drew the quarry toward the boat. High in the air the tip of the rod, bent almost double, trembled,

quivered, and darted. He drew it steadily toward his shoulder. A flash of white showed close to the gunwale.

"Quick, Amelie, net him! *Net* him, I said!"

Amelie's eyes traveled wildly about the boat; she saw the short-handled landing net; grasped it; slipped it under the fish; lifted him flopping heavily over the side.

"Oh! Oh!" she cried. "Boies, what a beauty!"

"Black bass," said Stephen in a voice of pride and content. "I thought there'd be black bass." He baited his hook with a fresh victim and prepared to cast again.

"Oh, Boies," said Amelie, in a throaty voice, "please don't be mean! Please, Boies!"

He looked at her and laughed. With her eyes shut tight she was holding her hook toward him to be baited. He impaled a worm on it, attached a sinker to her line, told her to drop it in the water and do nothing till she felt a pull. Within five minutes she got a bite, screamed, pulled with all her might. A big and surprised carp shot out of the lake, flew through the air, flipped itself free of the barb and fell, plunk! into the boat at her very feet. She laid aside her fishing pole to gloat with shining eyes over her captive.

"Didn't I do that wonderfully!" she cried.

"He's big; for a fish, he's extraordinarily large. Boies, shall we have him stuffed?"

"If you can make the stuffing, I don't mind eating him that way," said Boies, absently. "But I doubt whether that two-by-nothing range will be up to the baking."

Amelie studied his face disgustedly; it told her nothing; she would never know whether he was making fun of her desire to mount her wonderful fish or not. She did not take up the rod again nor ask him to rebait her hook. Guided by a rare instinct which was one of the great factors in her character, she looked upon her career as a fisherwoman as ended. An episode complete in itself, thoroughly rounded, conceived in impulse and carried through in a masterly manner to a successful and dignified conclusion, had naturally exhausted its particular possibilities of sensation, and to do it all over again would have been redundant and silly.

She curled up on the broad stern of the boat and with a bit of loose line tickled the shining sides of her captive. He flopped occasionally, flapped his tail, watched her with a philosophic, unwinking eye, and breathed more and more heavily.

"Boies," said Amelie, suddenly, "what's the matter with my fish?"

"Don't be silly," said Boies. "He's dying, of course."

Amelie cared not one whit how many of Boies's rapidly increasing catch should die, but that a like fate should befall her prisoner of war was intolerable. With a courage which few can appreciate she set her teeth, held her breath, fixed her eyes, leaned forward, caught up the slimy sufferer in both hands, and threw him back into the pond.

"You've got more sense than I thought you had," said Stephen. "Nobody wants to eat carp when he can have bass, and I've caught plenty."

He dragged the anchor aboard, took his place at the oars, and rowed slowly into the shade of the shore. There he stopped and studied Amelie solemnly for some time. There was something unsatisfactory to his mood in the way she was seated. He felt that she had not quite earned the right to be all of a sudden so confoundedly natural in his presence, and when she smiled he nodded his head gravely as one who says, "I thought so," and decided to speak.

"Amelie," he said, quite seriously, "there was one flaw in what I said to you last night. When I said I'd kill you I meant it, and you know that

I meant it; but unfortunately you know just as certainly that that horrible possibility passed the moment you gave in to me. The weakness in my position is that you may not feel bound by the sporting obligation to carry through your half of that bargain; so I've had to think up something else. I can imagine you forgiving a man for knocking you down, but I can't see you forgiving him for spanking you, and that's what I'll do to you if you don't toe the mark—spank you *just the way your mother used to do.* That's all of that; I'll promise not to hark back to it unless you make me. Now you'd better climb ashore and run along home. I'll be there in a little while and, just this once, I'll clean the fish."

The stern of the boat bumped on the rock. Amelie arose, hesitated, started to speak, changed her mind, frowned, smiled, stepped ashore, ran along home, and got to work. She put the room in order and then rather distractedly began her preparations for the cooking of a real dinner. One complication after another arose, for each of which she had to unearth an expedient from a portion of her housewife's mind which had well-nigh atrophied from long disuse. Before half an hour had passed her brain, her eyes, her arms, and her back ached. She remembered that

Boies had said she would work for him till her back ached, but dismissed the recollection promptly. Something else absorbed all her attention—the question as to which was to be the victorious warrior, she or the midday meal. She won.

It was a happy dinner, one of those unforgetable meals during which food goes right to the spot, but where the body retains the power to tingle at the casual contact of fingers across the table and to burn with an ominous fire at the surreptitious pressure of a foot beneath the cover of the board. The first time it happened Stephen could not believe his senses, and was slow to respond except that his cheeks turned red; but the second mischievous invitation he answered so boldly that Amelie arose and hurriedly turned to the business of clearing up.

With the drying of the last dish she dropped the towel on the table from sheer inertia, walked unsteadily across the room, collapsed half on the couch, half on the floor, and immediately fell sound asleep. Stephen stared at her for several minutes before he could convince himself that she really slept. Then he picked her up as one would lift a log, rolled her over, put a dark-green linen cushion under her head, a rug across her feet, and made her generally comfortable. He

sat down in a near-by chair and watched her. She slumbered steadily with that light, accurately spaced breathing which presages a long, long sleep. Presently he left the cabin and went for a walk.

Due east of Long Leg Hole, across a deep valley, arose a hill of almost equal height, crowned by a great bowlder silhouetted against the sky and known as High Rock. It caught his eye and he made for it; he plunged down the slope, first through ground oak, berry vines, tanglefoot, and scattered juniper, then through serrated ranks of the trees of the second-growth forest, and finally through elderberry thicket and swamp. He took off his coat as he started up High Rock Hill. When he reached the bowlder he found that only its western face was sheer; its top was almost level with the soil. He walked out to its edge and filled his eyes with the glorious view, but wherever he looked he saw the face of Amelie, flushed in sleep, framed in tumbled hair against the background of a half-embracing dark-green pillow.

He drew a long, deep breath of the cool air and realized that he was happy. A smile came into his eyes and played about the corners of his mouth. He thought of Ritt Bourne, and his heart warmed; he made a mental note of an

apology only twenty hours due. Twenty hours! He felt that he was a month and a world away from yesterday, and with that thought came the realization that he was a good five miles away from Amelie. How had he come to put that distance between them? What if she should awake, find him absent, and think him gone? He sprang to his feet, leaped from the rock, and plunged headlong down toward the valley.

When he reached the cabin he was hot and breathless. He rushed into its great living room with the name of Amelie on his lips, ready to shout. She was lying on the couch as he had left her, still sound asleep. He kneeled at her side and leaned over her, bringing his eyes close to her face. He saw the very conformation of the texture of her smooth skin and marveled at its minute mechanism, never before discovered. He felt her breath, cool and sweet in his dilated nostrils, and knew it for the wine of love. "Amelie," he murmured, "my girl."

She stirred restlessly and whispered his name. A look of wonder swept across his face. He felt the age-long pride of the accepted lover stumbling by God-sent chance on incontrovertible proof of his tenure in the heart of his beloved. He laid his hand lightly upon her breast. She stirred again and raised her arms as if to stretch.

They struck his overhanging shoulders and, sleepily changing their intention, crept about his neck, drew slowly tight, and hugged him in an impulsive, strangling hold.

"Boies," she whispered.

"Yes, Amelie," he breathed close to her face.

"Love me."

"I do love you, darling, with all my heart."

"Love me," she repeated.

His hands slipped beneath her shoulders He drew her close and kissed her until she fought for breath, yet clung to him with all the strength of her arms. When, finally, she released him, he forced back her head and gazed into her eyes, still drowsy, still bemused with the great awakening.

"Amelie," he said, hoarsely, "you'll never leave me again? Never?"

She shook her head violently from side to side and buried her face against his breast.

Chapter Seven

BOURNE had driven away from Long Leg Hole in a chaotic state of mind. All the way out, during his long conversation with Amelie, he had been up to mischief and had known it. He had started with the best intentions in the world to work her up to such a pitch of excitement and receptiveness as would give Stephen a chance to strike from the first on hot iron. He had succeeded admirably in that intent, but at the same time he felt that he had tormented his friend beyond the fair limit of endurance.

During the long, lonely drive back to town he regretted more and more the recklessness with which he had teased Boies to the verge of distraction. There was no doubt whatever in his mind that he had been as near to serious bodily harm in that tense moment of angry parting as ever before in his life. The realization made him feel a deeper respect for Stephen and brought about an increase in his affection for him, gave it a new angle and a fresh start by the impulse of the jolting, unexpected blow delivered against the monotonous familiarity which breeds indifference.

In this mood he arrived at home very late in the

night, but neither gloomy forebodings nor speculations as to the dramatic events which presumably were evolving at Long Leg Hole could keep him awake. He went to sleep promptly and, having taken the precaution to pin on his door a note addressed to Simon, the old butler, warding off disturbance, he slept far into the following day. When he awoke he was immediately conscious of a great weight within him. For a moment he was puzzled, then he remembered the angry parting from Boies.

He bathed listlessly, ate without relish, read with apathy the morning paper, including the social column, and foolishly spent the whole of the afternoon in his dressing gown. He stared at his reflection in a long door mirror and wondered disgustedly how six feet of brawn and muscle, a square-chinned, clear-eyed face, and thirty years of experience with the ups and downs of life could feel so abandoned, so miserable, so isolated from the sunshine outside, so aimless. He decided that under no conceivable circumstances would he attend that night the opening ball of the Bachelors' series. He asked himself if any other full-grown man of his acquaintance ever sank into such a puerile estate of self-helplessness and concluded that he was probably the loneliest mortal in the great city.

In this assumption he was wrong. Only twenty blocks away the genuinely loneliest person in the world was sitting on the edge of her bed and staring disconsolately out of the window at an extremely uninteresting square of blank blue sky. For five days she had been as terribly alone as one can be only in a crowded city which contains no single familiar face; for just two days short of a whole week Janet, the casual rock to which she had anchored the argosy of her precarious fate, had been sunk out of sight and beyond the ken of her professional haunts in the duties of nursing sundry blood relations stricken with the Spanish influenza.

The young person whom this chronicle has known through the respectful lips of the hotel lady's maid only as Miss Alloway turned from sky gazing to make a determined effort toward cheering herself up. As some girls, full grown and old enough to know better, still delight to play secretly and tenderly—God bless them!—with dolls, it was her habit to play with fancies. From being tragically pensive, her face suddenly assumed a look of lively animation. She glanced at the clock. Heavens! She was due to lunch at the Ritz in only half an hour! She leaped to her feet, ran to the closet, slipped from their holders an armful of frocks, and laid them out one by one and side by side on the bed.

Which should she wear? Her brows puckered in concentrated thought; she raised a pointed finger to her lips and touched them lightly. It was to be a large party, eight at least, rather formal. She thought of the women first and then of the men. The women she could see rather clearly, but the men were vague, all but one. He was tall and had crisp hair; he had stared at her in such a nice, unseeing way in the elevator. She wondered if he would remember. Perhaps he would say: "I'm sure I have seen you before. Now tell me, haven't I?" And she would smile for just a moment, look at him from slanting eyes, and say, with apparent irrelevance, "Sometimes when I'm feeling desperately lonely, I cry. Not hard, you know. Just a funny tear or two." And he would exclaim: "By Jove! I knew it! In the elevator!" And then she would talk to him, talk of things that no other woman could possibly imagine.

The girl laughed aloud and glanced quickly over the dresses on the bed; she would choose for him and for him alone. Which should it be? There would be another man there—the forward, conceited person of the theater steps—but not at their table. He would be sitting near by with a rather frowsy woman. One should dress to punish all such people; she must strike a sure

note of womanly elegance, not too girlish, not too old, something that would act as a foil to her pallor and still not belie her youth. She decided; she put away all but one of the frocks, slipped off her negligée, and began to dress in serious haste.

At last she was ready, all but one fastener at the back, which, squirm and turn as she might, she could not quite reach. But no matter; it would not be noticed. She picked up long gloves and crossed the room to pose before the pier glass. For a brief second of time her own eyes were entranced; they filled themselves with the vision of herself all in black. There was no severity, no somberness in the filmy dark cloud which enveloped yet disclosed her. All its art, as is true of every masterly creation for the adornment of the human form, centered at the waist. By carrying that crucial line a mere hair's breadth above the normal and the expected pitch, genius had made sure of the suggestion of youth. Just below her faintly rounded breasts gleamed a dull plaque of gold, serving as buckle to a false girdle and repeating the note of the floating flecks in her eyes and of the shining gloss of her tawny hair.

Suddenly she wounded her reflected self with the arrow of a hurt glance. What a waste that

no eye but hers should see the loveliness of her soft but potent armor! What an outrage there was none who might whisper, "You look divine to-day!" What shame upon men that not one of them could wear her at his side like a pearl shining in a patch of velvet night! She tried to hold her vivacious smile, but could not. She turned from the mirror with a passionate, rebellious gesture, and sank on her knees beside the bed, her arms outstretched, her face buried in the coverlet. But her despair lasted only for a moment; then she sprang up and, murmuring, "I've had a perfectly lovely time, thank you," began to disrobe.

It was already late in the afternoon when the fanciful play had begun, and now evening was falling. She decided disconsolately to eat in her room, and ordered a simple meal and all the new magazines. Dressed once more in negligée, she trifled with the food and then settled down in bed to read. Hours passed, and then her eye, skimming the social calendar of the *Spur*, fell upon a paragraph of hyperbole on the significance to a select world of the first of the Bachelors' dances of the current season. Immediately she began to dream again, to see herself wonderfully attired, hastening to add her youth and beauty to this gayest of all gay events. Again she

glanced at the clock; again she saw that she had not a moment to spare.

She arose, brushed her hair, tossed it high upon her head, caught it here and there with a hairpin, and speared it with a high onyx-and-topaz comb. She surveyed it in hand glass and mirror and stared in unbelief at the felicitous effect her carelessness had imparted. From that moment her preparation took on an added seriousness, and when at last she was completely garbed, save for one obstinate hook and eye low down in the center of her back, she reached automatically for the telephone and asked for the chambermaid. The woman came, opened the door at the girl's word of command, and stood there for a long moment, literally spellbound.

"My dress," said the girl. "There's just one hook I can't reach."

"Yes, darling," said the woman, taking the privilege of her years. "There, now." Then she added, after a pause during which her faded eyes had filled with tears for the sheer pleasure of looking, "Eh, but you are as beautiful as a wake, miss."

The girl laughed happily and picked up her black evening coat of velvet and lace; the woman hastened to take it from her and to place its cup about her bare shoulders; then she asked if she

should order a taxi. For a second only the girl hesitated, but her spirit arose in arms against a too sudden awakening.

"Yes," she commanded. "Tell them I want it at once."

She sat gingerly on the edge of the bed, tapping the carpet with a slipper that was impatient, not nervous, and gazing before her with the look and the smile of breathless anticipation. The cab was announced; she arose and said good night to the ancient chambermaid, who followed her at several paces' distance until she was swallowed from sight by the elevator. The effect she produced in the lobby was fully as flattering. Wayfarers stopped in their tracks and stared at her, but not rudely; bellboys, porters, and clerks ceased all labor to watch her pass; none molested her; all seemed to claim a share by right in a beauty which belongs in a sense to the whole world, the beauty of free and unsullied things such as sunlight, white-capped seas, and the heart of any fire. She sped by as lightly and as proudly as foam riding home on the crest of a high wave. The starter held wide the door of the waiting cab and bowed low.

"Where to, miss?" he asked.

"To the Vanderbilt," answered the girl, promptly. "The south side."

She bowed and smiled her thanks to him as the cab started, and almost immediately after crumpled into a pitiful heap in the darkest of its corners. The most courageously piloted dream cannot last forever; she had postponed awakening to the last moment, but now it would take a sure hand indeed to save the frail craft of her fancy from crashing on the rocks of reality. She asked herself almost wildly what she was to do. When the maid had suggested a cab it had seemed so simple a thing to take a ride in her fine feathers and return at will; but now she knew that she could no more return immediately to the lobby that had done her such eloquent homage than she could actually go to the Bachelors' dance.

She thought of allowing the cabman to reach the very door and then tell him to drive on to the Park, where she could give herself time to think things out; but when the moment for action arrived she decided it would be easier as well as more dignified to dismiss him and take another who knew not whence she came. The doorman handed her ceremoniously to the sidewalk. By an instinctive impulse of *savoir faire* she gave him the dollar bill she held ready with which to pay her public conveyance, and stepped forward toward the revolving door that

gave access to the first exclusive function of the season.

On leaving the cab she became aware of two walls of curious faces. Here was a test for which she had not prepared herself. These people hedged her in and seemed to challenge her; they seemed to expect of her pride, pomp, and the right thing. Something within her responded instantly; drawing a quick breath, she advanced with head held high.

In the meantime the persisting feminine traits which lurk in the blood of the manliest of men had been raising havoc with Mr. Rittenhouse Bourne. He had changed his mind seven times during the evening as to whether or not he would make an attempt to banish care by dancing with other men's wives and sweethearts, had finally decided about ten o'clock to return to bed and stay there, and five minutes later had found himself, to his own genuine amazement, unconsciously donning his best evening clothes with meticulous care. He took this absent-minded action as a sign sent direct from some heaven or other for his individual guidance, and immediately his spirits began to rise. He went to the ball. He arrived immediately behind Miss Alloway.

There was nothing about her back that he could

recognize, nothing in the high carriage of her head and shoulders as she entered the door to denote that she was quivering from the crown of her hair to the soles of her satin-slippered feet; nothing in her bearing to show that never before had she been so near to a ballroom or come so close to displaying in public the pallor of her shoulders and young round arms. The rear view of her smart coat with its high flaring collar merely told him that he was following a young woman of fashion and of most exceptional taste in clothes.

The animation which had come to life in the girl's face at command of an indomitable will as she crossed the sidewalk, froze to a look of dejection without terror as she found herself in the lobby which served as anteroom to the dancing hall. In a flash she saw the eyes of the official sitting at the ticket table pick her up and hold her for future reference. Her glance caught, too, the first movement of a flunky springing forward to direct her to the lady's room. Setting her teeth firmly to meet the ordeal of the buzz of curiosity which was sure to arise behind and before her as she should reach the sidewalk, she followed the revolving door around without pausing; but in spite of all she could do in the way of resolution, a big round tear forced its

way out of one of her widely staring eyes and bounded down her cheek. Out of an agony of shame she saw through the glass panel of the door the astounded face of the young man of the elevator.

He followed her out; he accosted her without the slightest hesitation and in a masterful manner which indicated long premeditation. In a daze she heard him say for herself and for the crowd: "I beg you to forgive me. I'm sorry I was late." She felt him take lightly hold of her elbow and pilot her once more into the fateful door. With her senses still in a whirl she heard him say to the flunky, as he relieved himself of coat, hat, muffler, and stick, "Madame will keep her wrap." And to the man dispensing tickets: "A table for two. If you haven't got one, make one. We'll take anything vacant in the meantime."

The next minute she was seated and saying in a low voice, which broke almost, but not quite, into a gasp, "A glass of water, please."

Bourne stared at her as he had never before stared at any person, place, or thing. It was an elemental stare; it devoured her as deliberately, as absolutely, and as finally as a python swallows a fawn. What his eyes beheld they seemed to consume definitely into himself, so that it be-

came for all time part and parcel of his being.

With head uptilted in the act of drinking, the girl had the appearance of looking down on him from beneath steeply slanted eyelids. The eyes of the ugliest woman become beautiful in such a pose; imagine, then, the supernal appeal of those of the girl peering down darkly from beneath the creamy whiteness of unwrinkled, petallike lids and measuring him with a furtive deliberation which was both shy and bold and that seemed to follow almost complacently the headlong onrush of his unbridled admiration.

"You are the most beautiful thing," said Bourne, gravely, as she put down the glass, "that I have ever seen. I say that not as a compliment, but in partial explanation of my superficial rudeness."

"He chooses his words well," thought the girl. "Anyone else would have said 'apparent rudeness'; they always do in books."

"It isn't just your face I have been staring at," he continued. "It's the whole get-up of your setting in that perfectly ripping thing which is mostly velvet collar, turns into a fitted coat over your shoulders, and just about the line where mermaids begin to be fish decides to become a lace mantilla You are like a glorified Jack-in-the

pulpit. Everything about you seems to have been born and to have grown up together with you as though you really were one of God's plants."

The cynical platitude that the road to a man's organ of affection is through his gastronomic center has its counterpart in the assertion that the way to a woman's heart is through what you say about her clothes. True to the metaphor which he had invoked, the girl basked like a flower in the sun at the whole-hearted extravagance of Bourne's praise. Just as she had divined a rotten core at the first sound of the voice of the stranger who had accosted her at the theater, so now intuition told her that here she was in the presence of abject sincerity.

Her body, which had been painfully tense under the strain of a thrillingly terrible quarter of an hour, relaxed; she leaned forward, thrust her bare arms from the shelter of the lace coat, rested her elbows on the table, locked her hands loosely together, and looked over them straight into his eyes.

"I want you to understand," she said, with the deliberation which added the crowning touch of charm to her low-pitched voice, "that I shall never forget the warmth and the wit of your kindness; especially the wit. Now that you

have saved my face so generously, will you please take me out again, find me a cab, and let me go?"

A genuinely frightened look swept across Bourne's features. His eyes gazed with an avid fascination at the paper pallor of the girl's smooth arms. They fulfilled the promise of the blood-tinged whiteness of her face. They led the daring mind to maddening and adoring vision of a body as pale, pure, and as fleetingly held as a ray of moonlight. All the component parts of his physical and mental being rose in a swirl of protest against her going and fused into an incandescent flame of clean desire which, once denied, would leave him as destitute as a burned-out coal. He leaned forward, held out a trembling hand as though to prevent her from rising, but stopped just short of touching her.

"Listen," he said. "You can't go. You must see by my face that you can't go. I don't know who you are. I don't know why you should have wished to come to this dance and, wishing to come, I don't know why ten thousand men weren't waiting to ask you; but you are here, and that you should be my guest is the most wonderful thing that has ever happened. I am C. G. Rittenhouse Bourne, commonly known as Ritt Bourne. Your bank or the hotel or your florist or tailor can tell you all about me.

I haven't any mother or sister; all I have is an aunt who was to have stayed on at Bar Harbor, but if I wire to-night she can catch the flyer to-morrow and call on you the day after. I'm not mad; truly I'm not. Won't you give me this evening on faith?"

The girl laughed. Her laugh was like a brook breaking away from rocks that would hold it. It was free, unafraid, and merry, yet low. It had, nevertheless, the peculiar penetration of all sounds which are set in a key different to that of the turmoil about them. People at near-by tables paused in their chatter and listened with that wistful and smiling intentness which is the wayfarer's invariable tribute to the appealing note of the hidden wood thrush. Then, remembering where they were, their faces hardened. They looked around and, having once looked, stared. Heads gathered together and tongues began to murmur.

Bourne did not join in the girl's laughter; he was too much in earnest; too much afraid and anxious for her answer. Men, especially nice ones, are always slow to believe how willingly woman gives; the more consuming their desire, the more do they taper their demands, like despairing beggars asking only for the small change in the pockets of a goddess. To Bourne

it seemed the height of daring that he should ask this vision, who in reality was a very human person and who longed very humanly to stay with him, to grant him the divine largess of an hour or two.

"Will you stay?" he asked, his burning eyes upon her face.

She looked at him, the ageless smile of conquering woman on her young lips, hesitated for a teasing moment, and then answered, "I will stay."

She raised her hands, slipped the coat from her shoulders, and let it fall across the back of her chair. She sat fully revealed in a frock of old gold. The delicate curves and hollows of her shoulders, the smooth column of her neck, the faint cupping of her adolescent breasts proclaimed her youth, and by the all but invisible pulsations of her breathing declared to the incredulous eye that she was indeed flesh and blood and no dream snared in ivory by the art of the master sculptor. Save for the black flash of the onyx comb, she wore no adornment.

A long but happy silence followed her acquiescence to Bourne's demand. Finally he asked her, formally, "Shall we dance this?"

"I would like to," said the girl, her eyes wandering for the first time around the room and

following with eager interest the movements of the dancers on the floor, "but I cannot. I have never danced."

Bourne hid his amazement at such a statement and studied her with a musing look in his gaze. Never before had he been so happy in idleness, so rocked in contentment, so held by the myriad mysteries which rise to confront the mind brought face to face with unexpected depths amid the usual shallows of the human soul. It seemed to him that no fate could be more rounded, more satisfying, than to remain seated forever in ignorance before the lovely, limitless question of this beautiful unknown and weave about her breathing but unrevealing presence a romance of perfection and eternal allure.

"Will you do me a favor?" she asked.

"I will," he answered, without reservation.

"You promise truly?"

"I promise truly," he repeated.

"Tell me exactly what you were thinking. You know what I mean—while you were looking at me just now."

Bourne nodded and sat in silence for a moment; then he said: "It isn't easy to put into words, but I'll try. I was thinking of the holding power of mystery. I was wondering whether I would not be a fool ever to want to know the answer

to all the swarming little questions about you that are stinging my mind into an ecstasy of life. Ever since I first saw you on that day we both remember, your face has never left me. It caught me and has held me, because of the unsolved problem of a single tear. I was wondering, too, if a lot of the inconstancies of one's friends couldn't be traced to revelations so complete that they sweep the platter of imagination clean. Finally, I was afraid the little facts of you might tarnish the glorious truth of you as I see it now. That is all and perhaps a little more than I was thinking. It sounds a bit strained. Do you think you have understood?"

The girl nodded. "I think I have," she said. Her brows drew into the mere suggestion of a frown. "Mystery!" she murmured, half to herself; then a gleam, half mischievous, half serious, lit up her eyes. "Would you like to play a game with me?" she asked.

"What is it?" asked Bourne.

"We'll pretend," she said. "We'll pretend that I have no past whatever, that I was born full-grown to-day, to-night. We'll agree that you shall ask me no questions and that you will learn what I am only by what I am. Will you play that game?"

"I will," said Bourne, "on one condition."

"What is it?" she asked in her turn.

"That we are to be together every moment," said Bourne, with the calm intensity of a madman, "every moment of the hour, every day of the year, all the years of our life."

The smile left the girl's lips, her fingers trembled, her eyes grew soft to a look of tender pleading.

"Oh!" she begged, "please don't! Please really play. Please smile. Please laugh for a little while—first."

Bourne caught his breath at the hearing of that half-spoken promise. He did smile; he reached out and actually touched her hand. "You are alive!" he said, softly. "Your hand is warm. When you turn it I can see the pink of the palm. If you were truly made of marble, the palm of your hand wouldn't be pink; it would be white like the rest of your body. I love you because there is blood in your veins; because if I should ever dare to take you in my arms your heart would beat and hammer against my side. Do you like me a little? Do you love me?"

"I like you very much," said the girl; and added, with trembling lips, "I think perhaps I shall love you after a long while."

It was the old, old plea of woman begging not

to be rushed, craving less the final joy of surrendering to assault than the preliminary give and take of a thousand little shocks of mounting pleasure, each one of them leading up to that maddeningly sweet estate known only to the blessed—the dream-drenched domain of triumphant love.

"My dear," he said, touching her hand again very lightly, "I will play any game in the world you wish me to play, only you must marry me first. It's too late to-night, but I'm sure we could arrange it to-morrow."

Again the girl laughed that laugh of the suddenly loosed brook. Her eyes sobered; she turned her hand and pressed his fingers with a tender, fleeting touch.

"Please!" she pleaded. "Do not frighten me, I beg you."

Chapter Eight

THE girl spoke with genuine trepidation, but not for any bodily harm that might befall her. She was conscious of a new possession, a feeling which filled her heart as one may fill a cup to the very brim and of which she would have no single drop spilled by the striking of a jarring note. Her eyes widened and for a moment lost their softness; they stared at Bourne's tense face, across which emotions were playing as openly and as unashamed as shadows in the sun, and she knew that above all things she wished to bind him beyond the grip of any passing fancy.

Bourne never imagined that in the instant between her measuring gravity and her gleaming transfiguration she had come to one of those momentous decisions which only the highly imaginative can conceive and then pursue with unwearying doggedness. The hunter in woman is necessarily more highly developed and more subtle than the hunter in man. In the course of their short contact he had given her but one clew on which to work, and now she pounced upon it with unerring intuition. He had spoken of the holding power of mystery.

"You are going to play my game," she said,

softly. "You and I, we are two people who were born to-day. If you have really lived before, I don't want to know about it. I'll ask no one about it; and as for me, I am a girl given to the world just as I stand, all dressed and grown up like the sweet dolls in the shops. I am what I am and from that alone you are to learn. You may read me like a book of stories written by an unseen and unknown hand, but you are never to ask this or that right out. Promise. Will you promise?"

"To hear your voice," said Bourne, "just to go on hearing your voice, I will promise anything. I have seen lovely girls in this town before; I have asked to be presented to them and have stood entranced by the softness of everything about them—their eyes, the texture of their skin, their lips, and the things they wear; and then they have spoken and spoiled it all. When we become a truthful race we will seldom say to our girls, 'Did you speak?' but always, 'Did you squeak?'"

The girl turned her head in a birdlike movement of interest and appreciation.

"I like to talk to you," she said, smiling genuinely. "I have dreamed of a man who should understand all that one said and of another who could say things, and I've balanced

the first against the second and puzzled over which to choose. How wonderful it would be if you should be both of them!"

"Wouldn't it?" said Bourne, eagerly.

"You like my voice," continued the girl. "I'm glad you like it, because sounds are so important. They have no theory in spite of all the rules of harmony. Some of them enchant us, some strike terror to the heart, and some are just grim, or comical, or perhaps weird, like the shuff-shuff-shuffling of feet in the Ouvidor in Rio. It's exotic; you get the truth of it slowly; you are startled; then you know all of a sudden why it is. Because there are no carriages, no horses, no wheels in that busy street."

"Rio!" exclaimed Bourne, as he began to ask a question and then arrested the words on the tip of his tongue, halted by a look of flashing admonition in the girl's grave eyes. He smiled. "Don't be angry," he begged. "I didn't, after all."

"No, but you were going to," said the girl, accusingly.

They were silent for a moment and then Bourne came out of his reverie with a sudden exclamation.

"Are you always going to be so clever?" he

cried. "You've given me the answer to a faint foolish question that has hung in my mind for six years; the sound of the clogs, clog-clogging in the Street of the Theaters in Kyoto. I couldn't understand why it has puzzled me and would never be forgotten. It's the same reason as the Ouvidor. You have thought it all out."

"Yes," said the girl, pensively. "You are right. Those two wheelless sounds are bloodless relations." She glanced up at him wonderingly. "Think of our both having listened to the dull clatter of the *getas* in the Street of the Theaters in Kyoto, perhaps on the same night!"

Bourne's face tensed suddenly; he looked at her shrewdly, but made no comment. Instead he said: "I, too, hold the recollection of sounds that haunt me still. The two notes of the blind masseurs of Yokohama, all night long; that's a memory of the fitful sleeper, and so is the unforgetable clanking tap of the watchmen with their staffs loaded with metal washers."

The girl nodded her head dreamily. "I love the old capitals," she continued, presently, with a distant look in her eyes. "Nara, with its funny big *Daibutsu* like a monstrous toy, and old Kyoto—so very, very old, so interminable around its palaces of mystery, so filthy, so stud-

ded with temples, so narrow in detail and so broad to the eye from Mount Hiei-zan. Something hurts here," she said, laying her hand on her breast, "when I think of the cherry blossoms of Arashi-yama!"

"You love Japan?" asked Bourne, tentatively.

She considered for a moment. He could not tell whether she paused to weigh the question as a question, or whether it was the answer itself that required thought. "Yes, I love it," she said, finally, "but with a tolerance."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Bourne, quickly, carried away by a keen interest which for an instant forgot her as a person and regarded her merely as a fascinating puzzle.

"I mean that I love Japan as I love an echo. The Japanese—what they are, what they have, all the fantastic imagery of their arts, handicrafts, and lore—are stolen from the great source."

"The great source?" repeated Bourne, vaguely.

The girl nodded emphatically; her eyes grew luminous. "From the Middle Kingdom," she murmured. "Who of us that has ridden on its great rivers does not know China for the cradle of human woe, draped and veiled in dreams of bliss. Ponderous land, forever pursuing happi-

ness methodically, like a clumsy child intent on catching a butterfly!"

He stared at her, utterly bewildered. His brain was in a whirl. Before his dazzled eyes passed a scintillating kaleidoscope through whose prisms he caught confused glimpses of this fresh young girl as a manifestation of the spirit of man's aspiration toward perfection, winging from far-away places, fugitive as a wraith of mist, eternal as the haunting fugue of woman triumphant, striking once in every æon, but never twice in the same age.

He lost all sense of values and of the present. As though her perfumed breath had been a subtle drug, his mind floated up and away from the anchorage of reason. Was there not, he asked himself, a legend of the essence of beauty as an epochal visitor to human flesh? Could it not be that he, Ritt Bourne of the city of New York, had been chosen as one of those widely spaced mortals to whom have been granted the tangible miracle by which hope lives, the incarnation of one's ultimate vision? He drew himself together with a deep, quivering breath and forced himself to smile.

"China!" he murmured. "Father of pleasure and pain, of art, science, and invention and queen mother to the Five Blessings of the heart's desire!"

A look of astonishment and appreciation sprang alight in the girl's face; then she leaned forward and bowed her head as though to lay the heaped treasure of its gold upon an altar. "Ah!" she breathed, "you can understand!" She raised her eyes as if to look on high. "Si Wang-Mu!" she whispered, a tender smile drawing the corners of her mouth and by that human touch alone holding her to earth. "Can you see her so high upon Mount Kw'en Lun enthroned above her fields of sesamum in the gardens of coriander amid the twelve jeweled towers which stand by the Lake of Gems, divine source of the four great rivers? To-morrow, to-day, and for a thousand thousand yesterdays she sits among her fairy legions by the forests of chrysophrase and the tree of life, the great tree of jade."

She brought down her gaze to his and met it frankly, daringly. He stared into the depths of her dark-brown eyes until the freckles of gold held there in lucent suspension seemed to twinkle at him from a laughing heaven.

"Go on," he demanded, with an answering laugh. "I dare you to go on! Tell me of the four great rivers—the blue, the white, the red, and the black."

"Ah no," said the girl, shaking her head and laughing with him. "You know too much.

You might think that I had indeed stood beneath the peach tree of the genii and eaten of the fruit of immortality. You would be afraid."

"It is the very thing that I have been thinking," said Bourne, quite gravely. "Shall I be afraid?"

"No," said the girl, quickly, a startled look in her eyes. "Of all the emotions, it seems to me that fear is the basest. I can't imagine loving anyone who frightened me. I—I do not wish you to be afraid."

Bourne looked at her so steadily and so meaningly that he forced her to go back in her mind over the words she had just spoken with childlike simplicity. The faint color in her pale cheeks deepened, but in spite of the smile which was slowly gathering on his lips she made no effort to retract.

"Do you mean that?" he asked at length. "Do you truly wish me to love you?"

She regarded him steadily, but made no answer; instead she continued with her own thoughts.

"Shall I tell you why I will never again enter the Hong-kew Market at Shanghai?" she asked. "Because of a beggar—an ordinary member of the guild, I suppose, but the first I ever saw. He was lying doubled at the knees and hips,

his head buried in the dust of the most crowded of the market's thoroughfares. People stepped over and around him. He never moved; never looked up. His rags and his hair were matted filth, his limbs were incredibly thin, and his nails had grown out and curved until their tips were imbedded in the palms of his hands. He was gray like vermin; a monstrous, unwinking toad. Have I made you see him? He frightened me. I didn't feel pity; I hated him and the Hong-kew Market."

Bourne was amazed at the suppressed vehemence of her speech; its intensity swept him away as though he were carried by the strength of her recollections to a share in the thing her eyes had seen. He forgot the crowded encircling tables, the thickly swaying dancers, and the syncopated music. The sights, sounds, and even the smells of China assailed him. He remembered how he had jeered at them in the callow days of his only complete swing around the world and perceived that each day, each year, and to-night more than ever before, they jeered back at him, intrenched within the lasting stronghold of an indelible impression. He realized quite suddenly that things Chinese had haunted him in a manner peculiar to themselves.

His mind, leaping to meet the girl's shrewd

discovery of so unique a national pastime as the practical pursuit of happiness, began to see in the art, industry, and philosophy of the Middle Kingdom a pragmatic strain bowing to symbols, but not to mysticism, and he wondered that never before had he remarked this popular marriage of common sense to idealism.

Noticing his withdrawal, the girl touched his arm to draw his attention and said: "I'm sorry I told you about the beggar. I shall never again describe anything ugly to you, never. It is wrong to say, 'Look, did you ever see anything so ugly?' when there are so many beauties which the tongue has never told."

"Would you call China a great source of beauty?" asked Bourne, speculatively, hard put to it to pick a question devoid of personal implication.

The girl did not hurry to answer him and he did not press her.

"She has one source of supernal beauty," she said, at length. "King-te-ching has seen generations come and go between each of its deaths and resurrections. It has passed away and been born again, measuring the years of its lives by dynasties. The reigns of forgotten monarchs are illustrious or despised according to the thin stream of pottery which they caused to flow

from its three thousand furnaces. Have you never seen them at night, setting the plain on fire? To come out upon the hills and catch sight of the level sea of flame—that's an hour of beauty. And then to climb down and on and on until the lake of fire springs up and around you, painting the heavens and the myriad hovels with an impartial brush! No one knows why the great city of artisans is perched along the desert flat at the fork of the rivers, miles and miles away from the lodes of clay and of ore which are its life's blood, but I think it was by a special dispensation of those gods who attend to linking the base with the sublime."

Bourne frowned in concentration and began hesitatingly, and then with a surer voice, to quote:

> "And birdlike poise on balanced wing
> Above the town of King-te-ching,
> A burning town or seeming so—
> Three thousand furnaces that glow
> Incessantly, and fill the air
> With smoke uprising, gyre on gyre,
> And painted by the livid glare
> Of jets and flashes of red fire."

At his first words his companion eyed him narrowly as though striving to find some motive lurking behind the recitation of the apt verses,

but by the time he had finished she was reassured. She nodded her head appreciatively and let her hand fall open upon the table.

"Smells; narrow, filthy alleys; miserable crowding hovels," she continued; "swarming transients, distrustful habitués; miles of dust, mud, and stagnant pools, but above, the clean flame of fire; and in every land on the face of the globe where men hoard treasure, the enduring flowers of the dark travail. To be beautiful and fixed is something, but to so spread delight to the eye that four hundred years ago a sultan of Egypt could do Lorenzo de Medici no greater honor than to send him a few pieces of celadon, that's to be truly a source of beauty, isn't it?"

"It is, indeed," said Bourne, and ventured another question: "What Chinese porcelain do you think the most wonderful? Which do you love the best?"

"The most wonderful!" she cried, despairingly, and threw out both hands in an entrancing gesture of disclosure. "Look at me," she said. "I'm not the seven books of wisdom nor even the British Encyclopædia. I'm just a girl."

Bourne stared at her as though he were discovering her anew. His mind raced back from its pilgrimage to a distant shrine of beauty, and his eyes devoured her lovely face and arms and

neck with an avidity which would have been comical had it been less sincere. His thoughts were written across his features. He was trying to persuade himself that this fresh young person who had touched with a fairy wand all his half-dormant centers of emotion and set tingling the faculties of interest and enthusiasm which linger at the crossways of youth, was verily flesh and flowing blood.

"Why worry," he asked, wonderingly, "about *blanc de Chine*, crackle, under and over glaze, Nanking, Canton, or the *famille verte* when you are here, and alive?"

The tinge in her cheeks deepened under his frank, unwavering gaze, but, as is the way of woman when she sees the object of her pursuit standing at her mercy and awaiting eagerly the *coup de grâce*, she swerved as though with a deliberate effort to elude the direct contact of too sudden personalities and resumed the intangible quality of a dreamer at large.

"You asked me which I love the best, didn't you?" she reminded him. "I love the whole, the self-colored pieces. Listen! Listen to the poem of their names. Sea green, pea green, and apple green—so soft, the tenderest, deepest rest for the eye that art has ever formed. Then the blues—the blue of the turquoise, royal blue,

mazarine blue, and, last, most unfathomable, the blue of the midnight sky. I mustn't forget the regal, defiant reds. *Sang de bœuf*, king of colors, mule's blood, pigeon's blood, ruby, pink, and coral. After them come the yellows—lemon, imperial, mustard, and straw. But, dearest to me of all, *clair de lune* for its lovely name; and peach bloom because it was a child of no man's fancy, but came to him like a flower of chance carried on the bosom of a strayed puff of air. But that is not quite true. I am ungenerous if I don't tell you that I love peach bloom because it is my foster mother, because it saved me from poverty, fed me, clothed me in silk and velvet and satin."

"What on earth do you mean?" demanded Bourne.

For an instant the girl appeared to be startled, then she seemed to take a fresh grip on some obscure determination and met his puzzled eyes with an assured smile.

"Shall I tell you?" she replied. "Shall I tell you of the Alloway vase?"

"If you don't now," replied Bourne, solemnly, "I shall die."

She sat for a moment in thought, her head drooping forward; then she raised it and gazed through and beyond him. "Imagine, if you

can," she commenced, "one of the indiscriminate, straggling, unwalled towns on the banks of the Yangtse; wander through the maze of the tumbled market which stretches its disorder to the river's edge; dodge the stalls with their huge bowls and smells of messy foods; step over baskets, produce, and squatting venders. Then stare at the craft—the sampans, river scows, and houseboats—until you find one particularly battered and sun-dried, with its snub nose buried in the mud of the bank. It is a glaring day; a hot day. Do you see it? Are you far, far away?"

Bourne nodded his head. "I am there," he said.

"If you are really there," she continued, "so many years ago, you can see a man step off the weather-beaten houseboat holding a little girl by the hand. He looks tall because he is so thin, but he isn't very tall. Under the brim of his helmet you can see nice eyes, but the light in them is asleep. He wears a beard that is turning gray and a drooping mustache with a fine sweep to it. He hangs his head when he walks, as though he were thinking and thinking where next to put his foot. The little girl has tremendously long legs and big eyes; she is all legs and eyes; her legs swallow her body and

her eyes eat up her face so that there's nothing to see of it except that it is pale, like the face of the moon. She is glad enough to get off the boat; she skips as she walks. The man leads her to a corner of the market and there they stand to stare and be stared at.

"They have come to buy rice and fish, but they are not in a hurry. The man calls her 'Clair-de-lune.' He says, 'Clair-de-lune, by the grace of God and no stomach for food, we'll just get down to Shanghai with a couple of hundred dollars Mex to bless ourselves with.' And then, quite suddenly, he straightens and his eyes blaze into life. He drops the little girl's hand, starts to run toward a coolie who is trotting by, controls himself, walks after the coolie with a swift, easy stride and taps him on the shoulder. Do you see the coolie?"

"Not very clearly," answered Bourne. "Show him to me."

"He was just the most ordinary kind of a coolie," continued the girl. "He had on one of those round inverted basket hats, very old; he wore a dirty smock which had been white ages before, and straw sandals bound to his feet. He was trotting along, holding his hand a little ahead of his body, and dangling from one finger of it by a loop was some kind of filthy bottle

with a cord of woven straw bound around its long slim neck. He looked to the little girl as if he had come to the market for just one thing—ten cash worth of oil."

"I see him now," said Bourne, quickly, answering her questioning pause.

"When the white man tapped him on the shoulder and began to speak," she continued, "he stopped with a vague stare on his face as though he was afraid he might forget about the oil. He listened, looked down at the bottle, shook his head violently, and started to go on. He would not sell the bottle. Then the white man called out, 'One hundred taels, foolish one, dishonorable son of worthy ancestors.' At the sound of 'one hundred taels' the coolie's eyes opened suddenly so wide that they certainly pained him; he gasped and presently held out a trembling claw of a hand. The white man dragged many Mexican dollars from his pockets, almost all the Mexican dollars he had in the world. The coolie could not count them; ten or fifty, they would have been the same to him, for never before had his sensible dreams prayed for so great an amount of wealth. He gave the white man the bottle, which was so incrusted in filth that one could scarcely notice how sweetly it was shaped, and stood staring at the foreign devil,

calling to the little girl to come quickly and hastening away toward the river's edge. You have begun to guess."

"No, no," said Bourne. "I will guess nothing. Tell me."

"The man shouted for the boatmen," she continued. "He gathered them quickly, for they had not had time to scatter far. With his remaining change he bought rice from the nearest stall; he helped to ease the houseboat from the muddy bank. He talked suggestively to the crew of the wonders of Shanghai; of how swift was the journey when heart and current travel together. Then he drew the little girl into the rude shelter at the stern, closed carefully the mat door, set the jar upon the table, sank to a seat on a stool before it, and looked at it almost wildly, a blaze of light in his eyes and his thin hands hooked together to keep them from trembling.

"'Clair-de-lune,' he said, presently, 'fetch a pail of hot water as though you were to bathe; I do not wish Ting-foo to bring it.'

"The little girl obeyed; she was very excited. She fetched the hot water and her best knitted washcloth, badly unraveled at one corner. The man dipped the cloth and, taking up the bottle very tenderly, began to wash it. As soon as he

had cleaned a shining little spot he set the jar down again and sighed and smiled and leaned over to pat the girl with the point of his beard—a way he had when his hands were soiled.

"'Draw up your stool, little Clair-de-lune,' he said. 'Sit close to me and watch the rising of the sun of happiness.'

"Because the small jar smelled frightfully not only outside, but in, he dipped it into the hot water, filled it, rinsed it again and again, and then put it to soak. But he was too impatient to let it lie for long, and presently he plunged his hand to the bottom of the pail and fetched it out again. The water was very hot; it stained his hand and wrist a fiery red, but he did not mind. He began to rub the bottle again. The filth wrinkled and came off in flakes and broad smudges. The vase seemed to awake from a black sleep as the man's eyes had awakened. It began to smile. Its smile was like red lips, incredibly soft and deep with imprisoned color.

"'Shut your eyes, Clair-de-lune,' whispered the man. 'Shut your eyes tightly.'

"The little girl closed her eyes with all the force of her eyelids; she felt the man reach down and take up the skirt of her short white frock; she knew that he was rubbing the vase dry and

free of the last speck of dirt; she heard him place it once more on the table.

"'Now!' he said.

"She opened her eyes. The first thing she saw was the man's face. He was leaning forward, his chin cupped in his hands. Tears were rolling down his cheeks and losing themselves in his beard. Then her eyes drew slowly to a spot of dark yet shining glory. The bottle stood firmly though lightly on the table; it was like a bulb with a long, slender, upright neck. By a mere shade the potter's wheel might have made it clumsy or vulgar or just beyond the narrow bounds of exact proportion, but none of these tragedies had befallen. It held her eyes and then, because its beauty was so smiling, it crept into her heart.

"The man said, 'Clair-de-lune, when was the beginning of the reign of Kang-he?' And the little girl answered, 'His reign began in sixteen sixty-one and ended in seventeen twenty-two.'

"But the man shook his head and touched the beautiful bottle tenderly with the tips of his fingers. 'How can you say his reign has ended when it is here before your eyes? Look! How deep is the luster! See how pale red swirls there into pink and here clouds gently to the true red of clotted *sang de bœuf;* look at the russet spots

and see how the verdigris breaks softly through them in a pale splash of green. How well they named this lovely and enduring blossom, my dear. They call it peach bloom. No man invented it, but when it had flown like a gorgeous bird into a chamber window Kang-he and his great master of the imperial works, Ts'ang Ying-Hsuan, studied deeply whence it came and learned the sure call to which it would ever answer. Those two men do not die while this lucent loveliness lives on. Kang-he still reigns within this orb of beauty whose colors were painted by no transitory hand, but were married under the glaze and to the glaze by the fusing flame of the *grand feu.*'"

The girl drew a quivering sigh which ended in a whimsical smile as her eyes came back to Bourne and the present.

"We loved it," she concluded, "but we sold it for many thousands of dollars, with which was founded the—a great trading house. The dear bottle is safe now for all time in a noble glass case under the guardianship of a nation, but I can't help wondering if it hasn't memories which put histories of new peoples to shame. Do you think it has forgotten its place of usefulness and dignity in some mandarin's palace of three hundred years ago? Don't you think it re-

members children—many children—that were born and grew old and died? Didn't it surely see the fortunes of a noble house rise to the peak of pomp and then fall and fall to the degradation of generations who could send a peach-bloom vase to market for ten cash worth of oil?"

"Yes," said Bourne, "but the dearest of its memories must be the awakening from its long black sleep to see the wonder and the adoration of a little girl, all legs and eyes, perched upon a stool in the gray light of the shabby houseboat. My dear, with each word that you speak and each moment that we spend together I love you more. Let's stop dreaming or my heart will burst. Come back to this room; listen to the music, not with your head, but with your feet. Don't you want to be human and play for a little while on the plane of body and rhythm?"

"I long to," said the girl, "only I'm afraid. Do you think that while I've been talking to you I haven't been watching the feet and the sway of the dancers? Sometimes at the place where I am living the music has come up to my room quite clearly and I have danced all alone as I have seen others dancing. Is it very wonderful?"

"It can be," said Bourne, arising. "Come along. Don't stop to think. Let yourself go; give yourself not to me, but to the music."

She arose, stood poised on the edge of doubt for an instant, then took her determination and let him lead her to the floor. His hand trembled as he slipped his arm around her; he was swept back to that gloriously sensitive age when the heart leaps to the throat at the touch of the one girl's fingers, when to press secretly her flowing hair to one's lips is to drink deep of the elixir of the gods, when to watch the rise and fall of her slim bosom is to court blindness, and when to think of the daring sacrilege of kissing her mouth in some moment of supernal joy is to fill the whole night long with the heady wine of first love's heartrending dream.

He could never afterward remember the moment of their coming together. He awoke slowly to the fact of her warm body in his arms and to his own voice saying a little huskily: "You are born almost perfect in this, too. Don't get frightened. Remember that if you miss a step I shall carry you until you find yourself again."

"But the people," murmured the girl. "Everyone in the room is looking at us."

"Yes," said Bourne, "but they are looking at the wonder of your pale face, not at our feet. I feel men staring at me and praying in their hearts that I may fall dead."

"And I, women," whispered the girl, "holding long, thin daggers at my back. Do you think they hate me because you are so tall and strong and carry your head so very high?"

"Forget them all," said Bourne, holding her more firmly. "You have found yourself; we needn't even talk. Give yourself to me and to the dance. We can even ride on the bosom of some far-away river if you like. But before we dream again, will you promise me one thing?"

"I promise," said the girl, promptly, with none of the mean bargaining which is the expected retort to the age-old plea, "What is it?"

"Dance with no one else to-night," begged Bourne. "You will find men crowding casually to our table, now that we have broken our own charmed circle of ice. Tell them that you have promised all your dances for to-night, will you?"

The girl nodded her head and the gloss of her loosely piled hair all but brushed his cheek. He looked into her eyes, so close to his own, and talked to them without the link of spoken speech. He was conscious of such an intimate communion as he had never before experienced. It seemed to him that by some alchemy of chance and fate the woman of his dreams had been delivered for a night into his keeping, and that unless he held her close, yet not too close, she

would escape again into that broad land of just beyond where all of us unwillingly keep our hopes and aspirations for things that are too good to come true.

They finished the last encore with sighs so equal in volume and expression that their eyes and lips broke into a mutual smile which seemed to weld the new link that had been established between them. Before they could reach the table by the wall their progress was skillfully blocked by no other than the man of the girl's encounter at the theater. He caught Bourne familiarly by the elbow and gave him the smile that is as soft as the pad of a kitten's foot with claws sheathed, and which, being interpreted by the initiated in the finesse of the polite world, says in unmistakable terms, "Stand and deliver!"

"Hello, Ritt, old man!"

"Hello, Dean."

There was an appreciable pause while Bourne received the full effect of the amiable smile. He had his choice between introducing the highwayman who held the narrow way between two tables, and throwing down an unwarranted gauge by deliberately turning a cold shoulder and leading the girl by a circuitous route.

He was on the point of surrendering to conventional necessity when he noticed a peculiar

change in the expression of the smiling face before him, as though its amiability had suddenly become fixed and lifeless, a mask. He glanced around and saw that the girl was gone from his side. She was calmly threading her way toward the ladies' dressing room, apparently unconscious of the half-veiled glances which assailed her from every angle and of the flurry of subdued comment which arose in her wake.

With a mumbled apology Bourne pushed by his acquaintance and made his way to the table where the girl's lovely wrap, thrown across her chair and still showing the impress of her body, comforted him with the promise that she must return. Many moments passed and the music had begun again before she came back to him. His alert eyes caught her up the instant she re-entered the room, and watched her progress with a possessive pride. She walked serenely as one who has the inborn right to homage, head erect, her hands held easily at her sides. While she was still far away her eyes leaped across the intervening space and came to smiling grips with his eager gaze.

In spite of his absorption he caught sight of another woman—a woman to whom his world could deny nothing with impunity, making her deliberate way toward his table with an evident

purpose which would not be turned by any trick of subterfuge. Bourne smiled good-naturedly to himself, for she was one for whom he held a deep respect; then a look of alarm froze his features as he realized that he did not know the girl's name. He prayed fervently that she should reach him first, and as he arose to draw her chair for her he whispered in her ear, imperatively:

"Tell me your name, dear. Quickly."

"Alloway," said the girl, startled, and looked at him reproachfully.

Chapter Nine

AMONG the guests of that assembly, which was uniform in correctness of attire, but decidedly motley in morals, was a lady for whom Bourne and every other man present reserved a special and peculiar respect. Far from being beautiful, she was ungainly in appearance and movements; yet, in spite of the forty-odd years that had passed over her graying head, she had retained not only a quality of youth as rare as it is unmistakable, but had reserved to herself certain standards from which individually she never wavered. Her name was Angela Abigail Livingstone, and it was her determined advance in the general direction of his table which had moved Bourne to such sudden inquisitiveness and action.

The very fact that Miss Livingstone should approach his table after three hours during which she had undoubtedly had ample opportunity to study his vis-à-vis came to him as proof heaped on his own conviction that the girl carried upon her person those unquestionable credentials of individual merit which are becoming more and more rare in the mixed company of any semipublic function.

"It's Miss Alloway, Angela," said Bourne, and added, turning to his companion, "Miss Livingstone. I'm mighty glad to have you know each other."

"May I sit down," said Angela, taking the girl's hand, "just for a moment?"

"We are so pleased," said the girl, softly and with a genuine smile of welcome lighting up her pale face. "Do sit down and talk to me. I would love to have you talk to me."

Bourne leaned back in his chair and, with a half smile twitching at the corners of his lips, watched on Angela's face the effect of the girl's deliberate, lightly sonorous speech. For the first time in his life he saw the older woman stare, but her gaze was immediately robbed of any possible offense by such a look of stripped sincerity as marks only the large moments of life.

"My dear," she said, laying her thin fingers on the girl's soft hand, "forgive me for staring at you so. I have been looking at you all evening, ever since you came in, and I found you so adorable that I couldn't stay away any longer." She flushed suddenly and added, "You mustn't think I make a habit of gushing."

"I think it is very nice of you," said the girl, gravely.

"What have you two been talking about, literally by the hour?" asked Miss Livingstone. "I confess to abject curiosity. Was he making love to you all that time?"

"Oh no," said the girl, quite frankly, "not all the time. We were talking of the Middle Kingdom, of dynasties and kings, of rivers and towns, of sounds, beggars, and porcelain, of temples, palaces, and forgotten capitals. I'm afraid it was a jumble of runaway thoughts, a sort of orgy of traveling in our minds."

"Have you traveled a great deal?" asked Miss Livingstone.

Unconsciously Bourne leaned forward. There occurred one of those almost imperceptible pauses which to people of refinement spell a subtle signal of warning against trespass, and then the girl answered, evenly: "Not a very great deal. There are so many ways to travel, aren't there? So many roads to follow, so many hills to climb, such endless rivers to explore—and, after all, it's only one road."

"What do you mean?" said Miss Livingstone. "You're so wonderfully young, what can you mean?"

"I mean," said the girl, wistfully, "that our feet can walk only a single narrow path all their little days until they are worn out and stop;

just anywhere—always in the middle of the beautiful long way."

Miss Livingstone glanced over her shoulder as though to assure herself that she was still in the half-empty, disordered ballroom. "I wish you to say that you will let Ritt Bourne bring you to see me; not to-morrow, but very soon."

"That reminds me, Angela," said Bourne, "I promised father I would persuade you to dine with us. Now is my chance. Say you will come on Thursday."

"I'll come," said Miss Livingstone, promptly, her eyes still on the girl's face.

"All right; that's fine," said Bourne, "and in exchange I'll promise to bring Miss Alloway to see you the very day after to-morrow—if she'll come."

The girl turned her eyes on him. "Why do you call me Miss Alloway?" she asked. "You're not a Southerner or a servant. How would it sound if I called you Mr. Ritt?"

There was a dead silence. A flood of color swept up over Bourne's face. "Is Alloway your first name?" he asked, in desperation, feeling Miss Livingstone's eyes upon him.

"Of course," said the girl.

Again there was a weighty pause. Miss Livingstone arose swiftly. "My dear," she said, "it

makes no difference to me whether you have a thousand names or none. Be sure and come to see me."

As she left them Bourne sank back into his chair, thrust his hands deep in his pockets, settled his head into his neck, and showed other signs of bodily and mental relaxation after strain. There was a faintly lugubrious look on his face as he said, "Now, Alloway, will you tell me all your name?"

Any highly developed personality is as sensitive a plant as the mimosa, and as subject to warmth, light, fatigue, or a blow. With the words she had spoken of the narrow, short path of life, Alloway's mood had changed as suddenly as a weather vane in a veering wind, and to her new attitude had come as a shock the awkward moment of the revelation of her extraordinarily casual acquaintance with her companion of the evening. She was seized with a sudden lassitude and made no direct reply to Bourne's question.

"I am very tired," she said. "I wish to go home."

She seemed not to notice the hurt look which swept like a shadow across his face as he drew himself together, arose, and helped her on with her wrap. He piloted her out of the room in

silence, secured a cab, helped her in, and, after telling the chauffeur to drive anywhere until further orders, he sprang to the seat beside her. Her depression had seized upon him and he felt himself being dragged down and down to depths he had never before fathomed; he wondered if anything could ever again bring him up to ride the high wave of elation which had only a few moments before been carrying him triumphantly on its crest. Then the girl's hand stole slowly from folds of black lace and came to rest lightly upon his arm. Immediately his blood rushed with a furious surge to his temples and he caught a sharp breath as he felt himself being whirled once more to the heights at a vertiginous pace. Her shoulder touched him, leaned against him.

"Don't think me ungrateful," she said. "Please, Ritt, don't be cross with me."

"Cross with you!" he cried, half turning toward her and laying his hand on hers. "I'm not cross, dear; only terrified for fear I shall never find you again."

"That is strange," said Alloway. "I was afraid of that, too."

He had an impulse to gather her in his arms and hold her there to infinity, but behind her naïve sincerity he sensed a boundless reserve, an innate consciousness of values, which would

later hold both her and himself to account if he should take advantage of her tender moment of repentance and break down in the promiscuous haven of a taxicab those last barriers beyond which two will forever dream to travel as one. He looked at her earnestly and restrained himself further by thinking of what a glory it would be to win her in some open wind-swept setting of rocks and trees, blue sky and flying clouds.

"Alloway," he said, "you are so white and luminous, so like the pale lantern of the moon behind a veil of leaves, that I'm afraid to touch you. You are like a vase that might be beautiful forever but for some careless hand. You know I would never hurt you, don't you?"

She raised her eyes slowly to his. "I think you would never wish to hurt me," she said.

"If I ever do," said Bourne, earnestly, "it will be because I love you. The madman in me doesn't want to let you go even for a moment, but I suppose that you and I are still mortal; though, in a way, it seems absurd. You must sleep and I must try to, but I can't even lie down unless you promise me that in the morning you'll let me come for you and drive you miles and miles into the country. Would you like to do that?"

The girl drew a long breath. "I would like

very much," she said, "to drive miles and miles into the country with you. When will you come for me?"

"At ten," he answered, promptly. "Now where shall I tell the driver to take us?"

She gave him the name of her hotel. "Think of it!" said Bourne. "You have been there all the time I have been dreaming of you! Don't you despise me for not having torn the place down, or at least stood in front of the door day and night until you came out?"

"No," said Alloway. "I would have despised you if you had done that. It's the sort of thing your friend, Mr. Dean, would have done."

"Not Mr. Dean," said Bourne. "His name is Maitland, so we call him Dean for short. But what do you know about what he would do?" he added, quickly.

She told him about the incident of the theater steps and then asked, "Don't you think that a man who speaks to a girl like that without an introduction ought to be punished?"

"Punished!" cried Bourne, excitedly. "He ought to be tarred and feathered. Cad is the word. He ought to be hanged. If ever I—"

He stopped suddenly; their eyes met. On the face of each was the selfsame expression of startled dismay.

"I—" gasped Bourne, perceiving that she had laid for him no intentional trap.

"You—" began Alloway, in a tone of amazed discovery.

Then they laughed; full-throated, open-hearted laughter. Bourne took her ungloved hand between his own and pressed it harder and harder until she said, "Please, you're hurting me."

He released her so suddenly that she seemed to feel a vague dissatisfaction, as though violence of any kind, even the shock of too quick a withdrawal or too abrupt an acquiescence, offended the fine balance of her sensibilities. She slipped her hand back between his. "I like to have you hold it," she explained, simply, "only not so hard, please."

"All right," said Bourne, patting it gently. "It's lucky you are wearing no ring yet; but I must tell you why it's different with us. Maitland couldn't possibly have loved you as I did from the first moment I laid eyes on you. He would have wanted to, of course, only he just couldn't. And besides, there was no tear bouncing down your cheek and shouting for help when he saw you. It seems to me that makes all the difference in the world, especially two tears. Don't you think so, dear?"

"I know it's very different," said Alloway, "but I can't tell why. Perhaps it's because I hoped you would find a way to speak to me if ever I saw you again."

"Perhaps," said Bourne, softly.

"I suppose it was very wrong of me to hope such a thing," continued Alloway, "but how terrible it would have been if I hadn't. I should have been angry with you inside, as I was with Mr. Maitland, and perhaps we never in our lives would have met."

"Perhaps," said Bourne, again, hoping she would go on.

"You must have known a great many girls," she said, presently.

"In a way," said Bourne. "Just as one knows a lot of corners you've got to keep turning."

"How many have you known?" asked Alloway. "A dozen?"

"More than that," replied Bourne. "About a thousand."

"A thousand!" exclaimed Alloway. "I didn't know there were so many girls; I thought they married."

"They do, you strange wonder!" cried Bourne. "At least, they used to. Now they are rather strong on lawful, but mostly temporary, partner-

ships in flats in big apartment houses that go five years without stooping to one baby. It's a sort of marriage."

"No babies?" said Alloway, wonderingly.

"I mean the kind of girl I was thinking about," qualified Bourne.

"You've never seen one you wanted to marry? Before to-night?"

"Never one," said Bourne, gravely. "They all hurt my neck—like diving into hard sand in two feet of water."

"Why do you think you love me?" asked Alloway.

"Because I don't know why," answered Bourne, after a pause. "I just woke up into loving you after a horrible dream. I have been looking for you in every one of the thousand girls I told you I've met, but you weren't there; only a little bit of you every once in a while scattered around so widely that I would have had to be a Turk to collect the pieces. They are hard, our girls, Alloway; brilliant, good to look at, some of them, but cold like diamonds set in platinum. You know one and you know them all. It isn't their fault, poor dears; they are the victims of a national mania for standardization and interchangeable parts."

"I think you must be wrong," said Alloway,

troubled. "I hope you are. I couldn't possibly make friends with a motor car."

Bourne laughed. "That's good," he said. "How quick you are! Girls for motor cars, some with sweetly running engines, lovely lines, and high polish; others that pretend; and finally a vast horde of strictly utilitarian machines that go about their business in neat tin suits, all looking as like as a packet of new pins. I don't mean, by any means, that all of them haven't a lot of fine qualities. They have; in a way they are wholly admirable, good hill climbers, though apt to get jumpy on level ground. They can't stand speed, somehow, but have an extraordinary appetite for it. They are always going and never going anywhere. But the worst of it is you know all about them without lifting the hood."

"It is terrible to know everything about anything, isn't it?" said Alloway. "The dolls in the window are always the most beautiful, the road that hides itself in trees or over a hill is the most wonderful road. Do you think it would help if every girl should say to herself, 'I'm not a highway; I am a path with twists and turns, with ups and downs, sunlight and shadow, and a goal of mystery always just beyond?'"

"If they could live it as well as dream it,"

replied Bourne, "it would help tremendously. For instance, so many of the men you saw to-night wouldn't be driving second-hand cars."

"Second-hand cars?" repeated Alloway.

He nodded. "Divorced women. Most divorced women are likable, and I'll tell you why. They haven't the irreplaceable charm of a bloom eternally fresh for the eyes of the one man, but they have the next best thing—the imagination or the courage or the inner difference that it took to make them jump the track and make for the woods. They aren't undiscovered paths, but they are competent and entertaining guides along a diversity of traveled ways."

"Could you love a woman like that?"

"Not willingly," said Bourne. "The men who love them carry a sure misery behind and a probable one before; but the men who take them as a compromise between the worshipful and the monotonous seem to come out pretty well; they use them sensibly, like halfway houses on the road to the unattainable yet never-dying dream."

"Would you have compromised?" asked the girl.

He paused before answering. "Perhaps," he replied, finally. "There may be no end to the road we travel, as you said to Miss Livingstone,

but there is an end to our traveling of it. Most of us never think aloud as I am doing now, but every man in his heart takes measure sooner or later of the milestones. When that day comes ninety-nine out of a hundred of us turn with a sigh to putting our houses in order, and take the next best thing. Thank God I don't have to worry over that crossroads any more."

Alloway's hand turned softly in his; her shoulder sank closer to him with a caressing touch that made his whole body tremble. There was an instant of suspense, of threatened balance, of touch and go between suppression and the loosed flood; then she sat suddenly erect.

"Where on earth are we going?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Bourne, dreamily.

"I mean, where did you tell the driver to take us?"

"Oh, that!" said Bourne. "I told him to drive anywhere."

She laughed. "How wonderful of you!" she said. "But you know we *are* mortal even if it does seem absurd, and I'm sleepy—I'm very sleepy."

He stopped the driver and directed him; then he took the girl's hand again and drew her close to his side. "Let yourself go," he said, repentantly. "Forget me; I have tired you out."

She shook her head in denial of both his request and assertion. She continued to sit very straight, her eyes wide open and fixed beyond the confines of the narrow cab. When they arrived at the hotel she stepped out quickly, started up the steps, and then turned and came back. She glanced at the weary night doorman and at the waiting driver; then she drew Bourne a step aside and looked into his eyes with a gaze so limpid, so tender, and so unafraid that he felt a nearness to her far more intimate than could have been imparted by any casual embrace.

"Listen," she whispered. "Put your ear close to my lips. Thank you. Thank you for everything; but most of all because you didn't kiss me to-night."

Chapter Ten

IT did not seem to Bourne that he went to sleep that night, but that he was translated by a gradation of reminiscent sensations, merging step by step up to a high plane of intoxicating dreams and airy unconsciousness halfway between wakefulness and slumber. To old Simon, who put his head in at the door at eight in the morning and again half an hour later, this definition would have seemed unnecessarily subtle; it was his opinion that the young master was sleeping like a log. The flair for never making a mistake acquired through two generations of service made the old man nervously acute, and finally, for no more palpable reason than that it was an exceptionally fine day, he decided to open the curtains with a rattle at nine.

"Hello, Simon!" cried Bourne, springing erect and wide awake. "What time is it?"

"Nine o'clock, sir."

"What? Nine o'clock? Run a bath for me, have breakfast on the table in twenty minutes, telephone the garage for the car I had out day before yesterday, and, if you can, Simon, if you love me, fix up a nice lunch for two to be ready in half an hour."

He sank back in bed just for a moment to collect his wits and to think how terrible it would have been if he had not awaked when he did! What if he had arrived late at his first tryst with happiness? What if she had been hurt and then piqued and had refused to see him when he came or—horrible thought!—had packed up her things quickly and moved away, leaving no word and no trace? He arose and went swiftly about the business of dressing, shaving himself with particular care, and giving to other details of his toilette a painstaking attention which is commonly supposed to attend only the phenomenon of calf love, but which, if one could play spy on the intimate moments of many a full-grown man would be found to linger on as a corollary of that inner boyhood which, if it be fed but once in ten years, never dies.

While he dressed he reviewed in detail the astounding events of the night before, and gradually returned to a state of relative sanity. He convinced himself that some unwonted wine imbibed from the atmosphere must have gone to his head and made him see events as well as his guest of the evening through rose-colored glasses. In the bright light of the morning it was altogether incredible that the girl should truly be all he remembered her to have seemed. He pre-

pared himself deliberately for disillusionment, and by exercising all his aptitude for methodical haste he succeeded in arriving at the hotel exactly on time.

Alloway came to him at once. He stared at her as she crossed the lobby, and, forgetting his manners, continued to stare. Her appearance did not startle him; he simply emerged from the doubts which had seized upon him into a completely different entity; the cynic died, the believer awoke. But, more than that, he was conscious of the instantaneous establishment of an extraordinary communion with this person who twenty-four hours before had been a total stranger. The prosaic surroundings of the hotel entrance, the faces of curious onlookers, the whole everyday world, faded suddenly away and left him filled with the rare exhilaration of one who stands at the verge of a limitless yet individual possession.

"Aren't you glad to see me?" asked the girl. "I have been waiting for you."

"I am struck dumb with gladness," said Bourne, gravely. "You can't imagine how extraordinary it seems that you should ever wait for me, especially when I'm exactly on time."

He led her out to the car and packed her away carefully in the front seat. She laughed at him

as he tucked a soft rug around her ankles and beneath her feet, and then drew it snugly about her waist; but he paid no heed to her merriment, for he was absorbed in the jauntiness of her high-collared woolen coat and in wonder at a hat that could be small and yet beautiful with the allure and the joy of a fugitive flame. He was proud of her; proud that she had the power and the taste to match her clothing superlatively to the occasion, to the resplendent morning and to her glorious self. He drew a long breath that was almost a sigh as he walked around the car to take his place at the wheel.

"Did you notice how oddly the doorman looked at you when he saluted and said, 'Good morning, Mr. Bourrrne'?" asked Alloway, as they swung into the Avenue.

"I didn't know there was a doorman left on earth," replied Bourne. And added, in explanation: "I was thinking of just we two. What right has he to look at me, anyway?"

"The right of a cat to look at a king," answered Alloway, promptly, and laughed so gayly that the driver of a passing car slowed up to listen. She put both hands over her mouth and rolled her sparkling eyes at Bourne.

"I mustn't do that," she said, "not until we are really and truly in the country."

"Laugh when and where you like," said Bourne. "I love to hear you, and if the rest of the world does, too, we'll have to put up with it. What kind of a look was it the doorman wasted on me?"

"It was a sort of mixture of hurt surprise and warning," said Alloway, "as though he wondered how we had come together and whether you were altogether to be trusted with anything so precious as myself. You see, I've been there a good while now, and all of them, including the solemn old hotel, seem to think they have acquired a proprietary interest in me and in all my lonely ways."

"Why should you, of all people in the world, be lonely?" asked Bourne.

The girl did not answer. He glanced at her and saw that her face had grown set and grave.

"Forget that question," he begged; "please forget it. I—I was busy driving the car and didn't think."

"But you're going to be busy driving the car all day, aren't you?" she said, reprovingly, "and it's such a wonderful—it could be such a perfect day!"

Bourne released half his hold on the wheel, caught up her hand, and squeezed it impulsively. "Don't worry any more," he said, smiling at her.

"The road is a silver ribbon and we must roll it up, all of it. Not in a tearing hurry, you know, but with attention and method so as not to muss the edges."

Alloway laughed happily. "I like your silver ribbon," she said, "and I have always wanted to be a big spool rolling along on its own. Where are we going? Which silver ribbon are you going to choose? Why choose any? Why don't you let your subconscious self drive the car while the wide-awake part of you talks to me?"

"All your questions are one," said Bourne, promptly. "I accept their command. Let the car look out for itself. What shall we talk about?"

"There are a thousand and one things to talk about," said Alloway, "all of them beautiful, but this air seems to sweep the mind so clean of all the thoughts that have been used before that I can't think of anything besides the wonder of being here and alive and happy."

"Are you happy?" asked Bourne. "Are you sure? Because to be happy nowadays is to share in a miracle."

"Why do you say that?" asked the girl. "Of course, I know very little about it, but I have always thought of happiness as something elusive though not easily frightened, something like

a bright, bold bird that hops on the sill of your open window, looks in, quirks his head, examines your soul with his brilliant eyes, and, if he sees no gilded cage with a nasty trap door, stays for a moment or an hour. There must always be an open window, of course: wherever he looks, inside you or out, there must always be an open window."

Bourne looked at her face, so pensive, so intent on following the whimsical thought. He could actually visualize happiness as she pictured it; he saw the bird of brilliant plumage and saucy courage, imagined it as a valiant visitor daring all except a threat of imprisonment.

"The things you say are like yourself," he said—"fanciful, gossamer winged, and yet not elusive. They have a solid foundation, like fruit that is lovely to look at and better to eat."

The girl touched his arm. "You are nice to me," she said.

For half an hour they rode in silence, and then, as he took a certain turning, she glanced at him swiftly, but without attracting his attention. His face was pleasantly serious, his eyes dreaming, and he seemed truly to be giving no attention as to where they were going; but at the very next fork in the road he appeared to awake to consciousness, to hesitate momen-

tarily, and to make a distinct choice. Immediately afterward his eyes clouded and a little furrow drew his brows together. Alloway's expression subconsciously followed every change; she, too, frowned, and presently she murmured, almost disconsolately: "Where are you going? What are you thinking?"

There was more meaning in her tone than the words implied, but Bourne was too genuinely preoccupied to notice the subtle alteration in her manner. Her eyes traveled ahead of the car and swept the hills on either side of the ascending road. "Where are you going?" she repeated.

"It's no use fibbing," said Bourne. "I know this road; I know it so well that I turned into it from force of habit and without any conscious intention."

His words seemed to reassure the girl. She drew a long, comfortable breath and then said, "If you know it so very well you can surely tell me where we are going."

"I could," replied Bourne, "if I knew myself whether we're really going to go where we are headed. It's a long story, but the sooner I tell it to you the better I'll feel. It will be for you to say whether I did right or wrong and to decide just what we are to do now, because it is on account of you that I have entirely forgotten my

best friend right in the middle of the greatest trouble of his life."

"Tell me the story," said Alloway, sinking back into her seat and half turning her face toward him.

He told her the tale of Boies and Amelie from its very beginning, back on the fringe of childhood, up to the tense moment when he had left the two of them stripped fairly bare of the conventions and niceties of courtesy, each facing the other, perhaps for the first time in their lives, on the battle ground of primal emotions.

"People aren't especially beautiful," he said, "when they get like that, but they are *real.* Their emotions may not be great in any sense of the magnificent, but they stir up all the greatness there is within reach. Do you get what I mean?"

Alloway nodded her head. "I do for what you say just now," she qualified, "but not for what went before. I can't see this strange woman Amelie at all. It is impossible to be a woman like that. She had a house to do in just as she liked; she was never constrained; she was not poor; *she had children!* All that, I can't understand at all, and I feel that if I could I would be forced to hate her."

Bourne laughed. "That shows how badly or

baldly I've put the case," he said. "Why, if you ever meet Amelie, you may not love her at first sight, but you will certainly be fascinated by her inaccessibility, if she has any left, like a high rock that takes some scaling. And if you could see her as I left her, with all her glacial precipices melting off her in floods until she was just an armful of palpitating and sobbing woman, you would adore to touch and feel the flame of her."

"How long did you hold her like that?" asked Alloway.

Bourne glanced at her. "Not very long," he said. "Certainly not more than five seconds."

The girl nodded, and by one of those reversals which seem inconsequent, but never are, she took up the trail of her own thought where she had dropped it. "I'm sorry," she said, "but I can't understand a woman like that. It isn't because I don't want to, but because there is a lack in me. Don't you suppose that is why?"

"No," said Bourne. "But presently," he added, "we are coming to a sharp turn. If we take it, we break in on Boies and Amelie and you can see for yourself. Aren't you curious? Don't you want to compare the daub I have painted with the live woman?"

Alloway did not answer at once; she thought over her words even more carefully than usual.

"If I were you," she said, finally, "I wouldn't go near Long Leg Hole to-day or any other day unless your friends cry to you for help. If your reckless plan failed, Boies will not wish to see you, especially accompanied by a stranger. If it has succeeded, then Amelie would be furious at our coming."

"Why, Alloway," cried Bourne, "you are a very Solomon for wisdom! Will you always answer my problems as clearly as that and as deeply? You are right; of course you are right."

"It is always ignoble to spy, isn't it?" asked Alloway, "to watch people's movements when they don't know you are looking? To spy upon hearts or souls must be much worse."

"I am reproved," said Bourne, gravely.

"Oh no!" cried Alloway, laying her hand on his arm. "I didn't mean it that way; truly I did not. I was making a rule for myself, thinking aloud as I have done all my life; seeking 'the even balance of the mind.'"

"That's a fine phrase, Alloway," interrupted Bourne. "'The even balance of the mind.' Where did you get it? Out of a book?"

"No," said the girl after a moment's hesitation. "It was given to me for my seventh birthday."

"Ah!" exclaimed Bourne. "You are indeed wonderful; you never come back with the ex-

pected answer. Whoever picked so big a gift for such a small child must have known her very well."

"It is a game," said the girl, pensively, "like all the things one loves best to do; they are all games, and some of them you play in dead earnest. The even balance of the mind is the most serious game of all. You shut your eyes tight, and hold out your hand, so." She extended her arm rigidly before her. "Then you put all the things you are thinking about in the scales and weigh them. Can you see the scales hanging from my hand? Sometimes the weight of a hair makes a great difference; then it is very interesting."

"Do you never make a mistake?" asked Bourne, with a caressing smile.

"Of course," said Alloway, "but always because I lack knowledge. If one only knows all the facts in any case, the scales cannot go wrong, ever. Knowledge is very important."

"I think you are the wisest woman I ever met," said Bourne.

The girl glanced at him pleadingly. "You are teasing me," she said. "Please do not tease me."

"Indeed I'm not," said Bourne, fervently. "You act as though no one had ever before adored you, as though you weren't accustomed to

abject admiration. You are like a flower that has lived all its life in a dark wood and learns its own beauty only in the pools of the worshiping eyes which first discover it. I know I'm treading on dangerous ground. Give me a chance to back up and save myself. Tell me, would it be spying to look at Long Leg Hole from two miles away?"

Alloway pretended to measure the question thoughtfully. "No," she said, finally, "not from two miles away."

They came to another fork in the way and she sat suddenly erect in her seat. "Which road do you take?" she asked, with a rapidity of enunciation which in anyone else would have been unnoticeable, but that in her seemed to verge on the precipitous.

"Why," exclaimed Bourne, "you *are* impatient. What do you think your clear eyes will see from two miles away?"

He took the left road, and the girl once more sank back comfortably in her seat. "Don't settle down too comfortably," he advised. "We passed the hidden entrance to Long Leg Hole a mile ago and here is where we get out."

He drove the car off the narrow clay road deep into grass and bushes, shut off the engine, jumped from his seat, and hurried around to help

the girl to alight. She stood up, raised her arms and stretched, her slanted eyes looking smilingly into his.

"That was very rude, wasn't it?" she asked as she gave him the tips of her fingers.

"Not rude," said Bourne, holding her hand tightly. "I like to think it was only intimate. Now jump." With a quick movement he slipped his arm around her waist and swept her in a half circle through the air, letting her down gently at the edge of the road.

"Oh," she cried, delighted as a child, "how strong you are!"

"Take off your coat," he said, laughing. "We are in for a stiff climb. Here, give it to me. I'll carry it for you."

He led the way through some bars to a grass-grown field road which almost immediately faded completely. They were at the foot of a steep rise which lifted suddenly before them in a hog-backed incline strewn with stones and stunted evergreens and clothed in the short, dry grass of late autumn. It was the hill of High Rock.

"Let us run to the very top," cried Alloway, as she started off at a great pace.

Bourne replaced the two bars he had taken down for her and followed with a strong but measured stride, far in her wake. He was

smiling indulgently, secure in the thought that his methodical assault of the long climb would soon overtake and outstrip her haste; but he was reckoning once more with the unknown. The girl stepped strongly from stone to stone, leaped dewberry patches as though well aware of the clinging thorns ambushed beneath their frost-painted leaves, and thrust herself sideways, but with an onward surge, between the branches of encroaching firs and cedars. Bourne stopped at last and watched her. She was like the embodied spirit of a flying wind. He imagined her blood as being boisterous in her veins, carrying her up and over and through every obstacle which opposed her progress. She reached the brow of the hill and turned to greet him with a derisive upflung arm.

He joined her at his leisure, not looking where he stepped, but with his eyes fastened steadily upon her tall, lithe figure silhouetted against the clear blue sky. When he reached her he found her pale cheeks aflame and her eyes flashing merrily. But her parted lips were drawing the long, quivering, telltale breath of the human frame pressed to the breaking point, triumphant alone by the miracle of youth. Her bosom was rising and falling with a shivering flutter at the peak of each long-drawn inflation.

He put his arm gently about her shoulders. "You are a wicked girl," he said. "You must never do that again. Get your breath and then promise me. Will you?"

She shook her head from side to side. "What does it matter," she gasped, "a little breath? I did it; I ran all the way to the top; I beat you disgracefully. You were lazy. All the things that are done with a terrific swing, all the *tours de force* in the world, are worth while for themselves alone. Aren't they?"

They turned, with his arm still around her shoulders, and walked slowly, as though by one consent, to the great rock perched precariously on the very edge of the hill, the same rock which had beckoned to Boies Stephen two evenings before, had drawn him all the way from Long Leg Hole, and then had promptly flung him back again. On its precipitous face it held a ledge, a hollow, which had cupped stray particles of soil until there was enough to nurture moss and a flush of fine grass, still verdant with the deep green of summer. A crevice ran slantingly down to this cozy niche, and with his feet braced on its sharp edge Bourne reached up for Alloway.

He lowered her to the ledge, which was comfortably deep and level. There they sat, side by side, and in the midst of a great silence let their

eyes sweep out and across the breath-taking panorama of gorgeously painted hill and vale, flaming forest, warm, brown field, and far-away blue water. Suddenly the girl sighed deeply, turned her head, and hid her face against his shoulder.

"I can't look any more," she murmured. "It is too wind-swept and flaunting, too beautiful, too gorgeously perfect. It hurts my heart."

He put his arm around her and drew her close. Her warm flesh seemed to creep through her blouse to meet his touch. He could feel all the delicate pulsations of the mechanism of life, the surge of her turbulent blood, the rise and fall of her troubled bosom, the agitated beating of her heart, and the less easily distinguished stirrings of the muscles which come into hidden play in harmonious accompaniment to every deep-seated emotion.

"Oh, Alloway," he whispered, "I do love you. My love for you is like that; it hurts my heart. My darling, don't bruise me, don't fight me, don't hurt me. Lift your face. Let me love you like a flowing river."

She raised her head slowly and gave her eyes to his. For an instant their gazes interlocked and then seemed to pass the physical barriers of the soul, merging into a single and

unfathomable communion. He felt a fleeting relaxation of her whole body, a tender yielding of the fortress of the flesh, that struck to the sources of his being, exhilarating and intoxicating him as with the first draught of a too heady wine. He drew her up to him with a strong firm hold and kissed her mouth.

Her lips were incredibly soft, yet firm; they had the resilient consistency of the living portal of youth. Their generous warmth, lavishly surrendered, enveloped and embraced him, as if in giving all, they assumed an unbounded and perpetual possession. Through their enforced silence they seemed to proclaim deafeningly that no other woman in all the worlds of fact or fancy could ever again thus flow through his veins or receive him more completely into her eternal keeping.

To his own amazement he felt no surge of selfish exultation, but a veritable awe with a touch of reverence in it. Not for the person of the girl. She was too human for that, too warm, too tangible to sustain any ethereal illusion. It was before the vast vistas she opened on the old basic verities of faith, trust, hope, and the supernal abnegation of a love that humbles itself not in sackcloth and ashes, but in the star dust of the bowl of heaven, that his spirit bowed.

Without need of words she said to him in her kiss: "I love you. I give you myself utterly. Take and hold me as treasure, or take and break me as plaything; the gift I give you knows no retaking."

He released her gently and gazed down into her face, grown dead white with the intensity of her emotion. Her eyes were wide open, swimming with light, depth, and moisture. They looked as though she had been careering on wings above the clouds; as if she had just swept down from a breathless journey amid crowding constellations. She narrowed them, brought them home slowly to the present world, glanced about her with a startled expression, looked finally into his face, so near to her own, smiled with a sudden blinding radiance, threw both arms around his neck and hugged him until, half strangled, he begged hoarsely for mercy.

"You are very, very strong," he gasped.

"Am I not?" she said, proudly, and then threw up her head and laughed her gay laugh of a brook set free.

With bodies close together and hands tightly clasped, they sat in silence. Their smiling, measuring glances examined the scene spread out beneath their feet. The shadows of distant trees drew steadily in toward their own causes until Alloway, noting their creeping movement,

seized Ritt's arm with her free hand and whispered: "Look at the shadows down yonder. Watch them. Do you see what they are doing, dear? The sun is so hot they are crawling into the shade!"

Bourne laughed aloud. "I hate to spoil such a darling fancy, but they aren't, you know; not at this time of year. They are merely swinging around, boxing the compass before the winter voyage."

Alloway drew quickly erect. "At last," she said, "I'm going to learn what that foolish-sounding phrase really means. Please tell me and please hurry. You would if you knew how my mind has been jumping for years between a conception of one man standing with his fists up before a goggling compass, and another with a hammer and a mouthful of nails preparing to box it in a real box. Which is right?"

"Neither," said Bourne.

"What does it mean, then, to box a compass?" asked Alloway.

"I don't know," said Bourne. "It has something to do with ships turning all the way around as they start on a long voyage; but I never worried to find out just what."

"You don't know?" said Alloway, sadly. "A big man like you! Ritt, I could cry."

"Could you?" said Bourne. "Please do; please cry because I can't tell you here and now about boxing the compass."

"Shall I?" said Alloway, and the next moment, for no reason and for all reasons, the tears were pouring down her still face.

Chapter Eleven

BOURNE leaped to his feet. "Stop it!" he said. "It's uncanny. Can you always do that?"

She reached up and caught his hand. "Oh no, Ritt, truly not. Only to-day, dear."

He drew her up beside him, took out his handkerchief, and carefully dried her eyes. "If it's only for to-day," he said, softly, "why, that's different; it's adorable. Now will you promise to stay here very quietly while I rush back to the car? I forgot something."

"Stay here all alone?" asked Alloway. "Don't you want me to go with you?"

"Shall I tell you very frankly just the way my mind has been working while I wasn't watching it?"

"Oh do!" said Alloway.

"Well, it suggested without any help on my part, that if I go alone I may kiss you good-by and kiss you again when I come."

"I see," said Alloway, thoughtfully. "I suppose I had better stay."

He was standing a little above her, and caught her off her feet to draw her up to him and kiss her; then he let her down hastily and turned to go.

"Wait, Ritt," cried Alloway, a little breathlessly; "wait for me. I've—I've changed my mind."

She joined him on the summit of the rock and they laughed into each other's eyes. "My darling," said Bourne, "you will never again have to trick me into kissing you. You did it for the sake of mischief, I know, just for the joke of it, but, unfortunately, the way of your doing it has made me love you just a little more and I tell you that from now on I am really and truly a madman. I can't conceive of going to the car without you. I can't believe that I'll ever again be away from you for an hour, and if God, who is almighty and could do it if it's really best for all concerned, doesn't keep this night from falling, I don't know what you and I are to do."

"We might sit up for to-night," said Alloway, lightly, playing with a loose button on his coat, "but what about to-morrow night and the night after that?"

"By to-morrow night," said Bourne, quite gravely, "we'll be married. I'm only worrying about to-night."

Alloway looked at his unsmiling face and her own grew suddenly older. She sat down on the flat rock and drew him to a seat beside her.

"Listen, dear," she said. "We won't make a

joke of marriage ever, you and I. We won't laugh at our own; we won't think lightly of anyone else's. You have been terribly afraid of marriage and I have never been afraid. You have known too much, and perhaps I have known too little."

"No! No!" said Bourne, crushing her fingers. "It's just that. I don't want you to know more. I'm not laughing; I'm in such dead earnest that I'm trembling for fear of making a stumbling step. I wish you as you are; I love you as you are. I want you to love me not as I am to a hundred friends, but as you have found me, as I live only in your heart. Please, Alloway. I beg you, Alloway, just marry me this once to-morrow and you shall have your way forever after."

"Oh, Ritt," cried Alloway, smiling through moist eyes, "don't you know how funny a thing you have said? How many times can I marry you, my dear boy, to-morrow or ever?"

"I have said nothing funny," replied Bourne, doggedly. "You know very well what I meant. I do not wish to present you to my friends to be pawed over and manhandled and talked over and under and inside out. I cannot bear the thought of being separated from you for one moment more than is absolutely necessary. I don't want

you to meet a lot of men just to find out if you really love me best; I would be terrified day and night for fear you didn't. I don't want even to be engaged to you and have everybody be nice to you just to look you over and ask you a million and one questions."

With every word he said Alloway's eyes opened wider and her face assumed an extraordinary statuesque sternness, as though it were indeed carved from marble.

"No," she said, when he paused, "never that; I wouldn't want that, either."

"Of course you wouldn't," said Bourne. "I don't know how I knew it, but I did. I have always believed that a girl's wedding day belonged to herself and that it should follow every twist and turning of her heart's desire. But what have you and I to do with striped awnings, curious eyes, orange blossoms, flowing veils, and a strip of Turkey-red carpet? To-day is our wedding day and this is our marriage."

He swept his arm around in a large gesture which took in rock, hill, earth, sky, and gleaming water. Her eyes followed the arc of his hand.

"It is very beautiful," she said. "Of course I have dreamed a little of orange blossoms and I've handled a dear old veil of lace, very yellow now, and wondered and wondered. But you are

right; those are things that do not matter, especially under the eyes only of strangers."

Her lips trembled a little on the last word and Bourne turned and caught her to him. "My dear," he said, "if it matters to you only a little, if not having them will plant the tiniest seed of regret, we'll get the orange blossoms and the veil."

She smiled wistfully and shook her head.

"Look," she said, pointing just beyond the rock. "Mushrooms! The symbol of Cheou-lao himself, god of longevity. See him, Ritt, mounted on his stag, venerable, gentle, and smiling. He is looking at you; he will bring long life and luck to you because he holds in his hand the fruit of the tree *fan-tao*, which blossoms every three thousand years and yields its peaches only three thousand years after. Can't you see him, dear? He has a monstrous high head and long, white eyebrows and white hair. There he goes, down the gray hill and into the edge of the wood. I can follow him still. Don't waken me; let me dream and dream for fear of the impossible thing you are asking me, for fear of hurting you."

"Dream as far and as often as you like," said Bourne. "If I can help it, I shall never waken you. I ask you nothing impossible; stay by my side, dream through to-morrow."

"Suppose I were mad, too, and said yes," said

the girl. "Just let us start with that and take step by step and see how soon we would crash against a wall. This moment, I am not young any more, Ritt; I have grown older than you. See how I have forgotten my fancies and how my mind bumps against things like hateful hotels, packing, curious eyes and guessing whispers, trains, *new* furniture, and then all that unknown side of it which is you. The first step, I go back to the hotel for the night."

"I take you at your word," said Bourne. "I will be practical. Is there anyone in the world who can stop you from marrying me—anyone, I mean, who has rights over you?"

Alloway's lips trembled. "No one," she whispered.

"Forgive me, Alloway," said Bourne, gravely. "I don't wish to trespass, dear, but I must, just for a second. You mean that you have no father and no mother?"

She hung her head and shook it quickly from side to side. Already he knew her so well that he could feel her determination not to weep, not to give way to grief or any other emotion which might distract her from weighing this matter of marriage, this bridge-burning venture so swiftly thrust upon her, in the even balance of the mind. She raised clear eyes, profoundly

deep, to his; her face was deathly white, but possessed of an astonishing serenity.

"I never knew my mother; my father is dead," she said, with measured deliberation. For a single instant her countenance seemed to gleam as through a torn veil; a flash of elemental fire lit up its mobile features and then died, leaving her brow once more placid, her eyes alive and conscious only of the present.

"I, too, lost my mother many years ago," said Bourne, quickly, "but I still have my father. I live with him. He is a wonderful man. He will know you and love you from across the room before ever you have opened your lips."

Alloway shook her head doubtfully. "He will hate me if I do this thing. I am glad, for you, that you still have him." She paused, halted by an instinctive delicacy from completing her thought.

"You mean," said Bourne, with equal intuition, "that you would have been happier if we had been both quite, quite alone."

She nodded her head. "If it had happened to be so, I could not have denied you."

"I can see that," said Bourne, fairly. "It would have robbed you of every argument, settled every doubt; but when you know my father you will give thanks in your heart that you couldn't wish him quite away."

"He will ask questions," said Alloway.

"I will engage for him," said Bourne, promptly, "that he will take my pledge and never ask you a single question which you will not be glad to answer."

"If we do it without telling him, he will never forgive me."

"But I will tell him," said Bourne. "I'll tell him to-night."

"Then he'll be there."

"No, dear; not if you don't wish it. He'll only arrange all the details for us down at the City Hall and see that the papers make little or perhaps nothing of the news. That is saying a great deal, and I am not bragging when I say that J. E., my father, is the one man I know who could give you the wedding present of keeping the news out altogether if you wish it."

"Could he do that?" asked Alloway, hopefully, clasping her hands.

Bourne nodded. "I'll make him promise; I'll let you off for a week if he doesn't promise."

"And after that part is over," said Alloway, "after we are duly and properly married, what then?"

"We will go straight to the house in Murray Hill, my father's house and mine," said Bourne.

"It is a big home, so big that you will be able to find what you wish there. Before we do anything else, I wish to wrap it around you, my home, so that wherever we go, whatever we do, you will sometimes sigh and say, 'Ritt, let's go straight home; I am tired.' It's that kind of a place—a great big mothering house with not a single empty spot in it anywhere, because people have lived in it and loved it so long."

"I will go with you, Ritt," said Alloway, simply, laying her two hands, palms up, in his. He dropped his face in them. She let it lie there for a moment; then she took her hands away and with an encircling movement of indescribable tenderness drew his head to rest on her knees and passed her fingers soothingly through his hair.

Huddled thus together on the top of High Rock, they sat for half an hour on the crown of the world, caring not who saw and feeling all those delicate, deep-seated, and maddening pulsations which hover busily through the blessed union of youth and love. Their blood raced hither and thither as though through veins made common, and filled their breasts with the self-same pain of pleasure, choking on its own greedy haste, demanding that they hear the long-drawn inner cry which sounds but once full

throated in the human heart and evermore is merely echoed.

It was Alloway who finally broke the silence. "Ritt," she said, "I'm sorry, dear, but I'm faint with hunger."

He leaped to his feet and snatched out his watch. "And no wonder!" he cried. "That's what I was going to fetch from the car, happy years ago! Lunch!"

"There's really a luncheon in the car?" cried Alloway, her face brightening to an everyday cheerfulness. "That is wonderful news. You see, dear, I'm so disgracefully healthy that the flesh and bone of me simply wails when feeding time goes by and no bottle. Do you love me less for lying to you about it?"

"I love you more and more and more," said Bourne, "partly because no one else would have thought of confessing so frankly, but most of all because I'm as hungry as you are. And we are not the only ones who think of food. Look over there at Long Leg Hole. You know that's what we came up here to do. See the smoke? Somebody is getting ready to cook a fish supper, and it must be Amelie. I'd like to take you over there, just show you to her, and whisk you away before she could catch her breath."

He looked at Alloway questioningly, the pride

of possession shining in his eyes, but she shook her head, took his hand, and led him slowly down the hill. "Not to-day," she said. "To-day I want to be alone with you and with myself."

When Bourne reached home he was disappointed to learn that he would have to dine alone. He took a bath, changed into fresh clothes, and when the lonely meal was over gave orders that he be informed of his father's arrival. He went immediately to the library, sat down and tried to read, but his thoughts dragged him again and again to his feet. He paced up and down feverishly, unconscious of the chilly air which seeped through an open window. The log fire lighted in the wide-open hearth seemed to him wholly unnecessary, and when Simon slipped noiselessly in to replenish it he waved him away.

"You are sure my father hasn't come in, Simon?" he asked, nervously.

"Quite sure, sir," answered Simon. "I will stay up myself and tell him you are waiting here to speak to him. You need not worry, Master Ritt. I hope there is no trouble."

When Simon committed one of his rare reversions to a form of address abandoned on the occasion of his young master's coming of age, it was an indication that he stood willing to serve not

only as butler, but as mentor and ancient friend. Bourne had long since recognized the old man's informal right of way to his own heart, a privilege all the more readily granted because it had never been abused.

"Trouble, Simon?" he cried, the clouds lifting momentarily from his brow. "It's just the opposite, you old scout. I'm the happiest man in the world; that's what's the matter with me. You'll know all about it to-morrow."

"I see, sir," said Simon, the blood flaming red in his pink cheeks. "I understand, and wish you luck, sir, and if I may say so, it's high time." He reverted promptly to the butler and asked, "Shall I leave the window open?"

"Please," said Bourne, and resumed his pacing to and fro.

On the hill, with Alloway's hand in his, he had seen his father clearly; he had been able to summon at will J. E.'s kindly and understanding side to hear and judge the astounding proposition which he was about to put before him. But as the moment approached when he would have to say in words what his heart so fully understood, he began to see how preposterous his demands might easily appear. For years he had laughed with the rest of the world at young men who said in their ordinary infatuations, "When you see

her, if you only see her, it will be all right." How could be persuade so shrewd a man as his father that such a being as he believed Alloway to be actually existed, that she was not the time-worn illusion of every lover's mind?

When his father finally entered the room, unnoticed, at a late hour, he found Ritt sitting despondently in a big chair, his head, usually erect, fallen forward and his hands drooping listlessly at the wrists. John Bourne stood for a long moment looking at his son. The heavy features of his face, dominated by the small, brilliant eyes and ponderous nose, softened to an almost feminine tenderness, and it was this expression, lingering beyond the thoughts that had caused it, which Ritt surprised on his father's face when J. E. spoke.

"It's not as bad as all that, is it?" he asked. "Tell me."

Ritt sprang to his feet and stared at his father; again the clouds lifted from his brow. "Dad," he said, "it's simply wonderful that this part of you should have come to me. I don't want to be measured by those gimlet eyes of yours tonight, not once, not for even a doubting flash. I want to be taken on trust; I want to be believed outright just because you love me and for no other visible reason in the world."

"Hush, boy!" said J. E., smiling. "Let's sit down. Whatever it is, let's take this great thing quietly as it deserves. To put your mind at rest I'll tell you now, out of faith in what I've tried to make of you, that whatever you ask I'll give, and give freely. If that proves to be a mistake, why let it fall on both our heads. You are my son."

Ritt grasped his father's arms, so flabby to look at, so incredibly firm and anchored in strength to the touch. Tears rose to his eyes; he gripped with all his might, but did not try to answer at once with words. Finally he turned and sat down with a deep, happy sigh of relief.

"I can tell you," he said, half to himself. "Of course I can tell you."

"Of course you can," said J. E., cutting and lighting a long black cigar with deliberate care. "You are married; let's start with that."

"No," said Ritt, taken aback. "That is, not quite. But it's almost as bad." Then he blurted out, "The whole and the worst of it is that I want you to fix everything for me to be married at the City Hall at ten o'clock to-morrow and then perform the small miracle of keeping the thing out of the papers."

"That's not such a very tall order," said J. E., thoughtfully. "I feel sure we can arrange the details. Now why?"

Ritt went back to the moment of the tear in the elevator; he tried to describe Alloway as he had seen her then and not in the full light of subsequent knowledge. He made his father party to the thoughts the single sight of the girl had aroused, and fairly excited him with a dramatic account of the encounter in the revolving glass door and of the astounding advent of the second tear.

"I was ready that time, dad," he said. "Something in me shouted at my brain what to do. I kept right on going, came out on the sidewalk almost at her side, saw an expression of despair and do-or-die in her face, and took off my hat and said quite clearly so the crowd could hear if it wanted to, 'Please forgive me; I'm sorry I was late.'"

"Good!" said J. E. "I'm proud of you. And what did she do?"

"She took my arm, walked in to a table with me, caught up a glass of water, drank it gulpily as though it was only just in time, thanked me, and said she would have to go."

"But you didn't let her," interjected J. E.

Ritt shook his head violently. "I didn't," he said, "and I never shall."

It took him an hour to recount the wonders of all the girl had talked about, and, when he had

finished, J. E. joined the blunt tips of his fingers and thumbs and sent clouds of smoke through the arch thus formed, while he collected and sorted his impressions.

"That was last night," said Bourne the younger, preparing to bring the narrative up to date with an account of the greatest day of his life.

"Wait a minute," said his father. "You've been traveling fast in exceptionally good company; now give your old man a chance to catch up. I can picture the girl as clearly as I wish to before I see her in the flesh. What I would like to do is to perceive her mind. I see by your smile that you think such an enterprise is hopeless, but it isn't. I've learned that just as there are only half a dozen watch movements known to man in spite of the millions of watches the world has produced, so there are certainly not half a dozen types of mind, the variation from which in any individual is merely in the degree of abnormal development or along the fixed line of perfection. Now tell me, did you find out in all that talk how the girl happened to come uninvited to your ball?"

"No," said Ritt, after a pause. "Now that you call my attention to it, I remember I didn't."

"Well," said his father, complacently, "I know why; I know because I have fixed the type of her mind."

His son sat up sharply. "Why was it?" he asked.

"That," replied his father, "you will have to find out for yourself. Because you have succeeded in making me intensely anxious to meet this extraordinary young person is reason enough for me to start right now playing fair to both sides. Go on with your story."

As he looked back on the day it seemed quite incredible to Ritt that a dozen hours should hold so much of history and of life. He thought it would surely take all night to lead his father through the far reaches and the quirks and turns of the blissfully long road he had followed hand in hand with Alloway, yet always toward her. But when he actually began to talk he found that a single word often covers, though it may not reveal, a century of exaltation. He ended, as he thought, rather lamely; but his father expressed no dissatisfaction. On the contrary, he nodded his head several times; but whether it was in approbation of his son, of Alloway, or of his own perspicacity, Ritt could not determine.

"Summing up, we have this," said J. E., after a moment's thought, "the girl prefers to remain

a mystery, save in that she herself is the answer to her riddle. We know that she is very much alone, consequently we can understand her desire to marry you alone. As soon as the deed is done you are to bring her to my office, where I shall wait for you with more genuine old-fashioned curiosity than trepidation. You see, she has won me that far already."

"It is splendid of you," said his son, impulsively.

"Splendid of her, you mean," corrected J. E. "I am to ask no questions; I accept that. And we are to dine here to-morrow night, with Angela as the sole guest; I accept that, too, and welcome it. I anticipate having more fun with Angela's face than I had with my first kite, and more kinds of entertainment with your lovely unknown than I thought were left in a stale world. Why, boy, any girl that could say so many mind-pricking things in twenty-four hours, any girl that could lead to such an astounding program by whatever path, say—" He heaved his great bulk from his chair with astonishing alacrity and struck his son's shoulder a blow which all but dislocated it. "Stand up, sir," he thundered, "and let me congratulate you! You have found the lost land of Ophir."

They shook hands until Ritt groaned and

pleaded for mercy. With his arm thrown across his son's shoulder, J. E. led him toward the door. "You must go to bed now," he said, "though you may think you won't sleep a wink. To-morrow, after the visit to the office, you shall bring her here to your mother's rooms. They are just as she left them, except that last spring I had fresh chintzes put in her sitting room—the dearest, brightest room in the house."

"Father!" said Ritt, and stopped, choked by a sudden thickness in his throat. His eyes, meeting J. E.'s unwavering gaze, spoke eloquently his full thought.

"Not a word of that," said John Bourne, quickly. "I hate half givers. Either your girl is everything that you say or we all go down in a single great wreck. I believe in her with my head as you believe in her with your heart. To-morrow she becomes the mistress of this house, of all its traditions and memories. She can make of it a plaything or a shrine; but you and I, we have cast our die. It's a great thing, Ritt, it always has been a great thing, to gamble your whole world on the turn of a woman."

Sharply at nine o'clock of the next morning Ritt Bourne, suffering with such an attack of palpitation of the heart as attends only youth very much in love, presented himself in the lobby

of the hotel and asked that his name be sent to "Miss Alloway." The clerk complied with the request, but presently difficulties began to develop. There was argument over the telephone, and finally, with a shrug of the shoulders which said plainly to any observer that he would do it and damn the consequences, the clerk came out to Bourne from behind his barrier and said in a low tone, "Miss Alloway Schuyler wishes you to come to her room."

"Miss—" began Bourne and then caught his tongue between his teeth. "What number?" he asked, and a moment later, assailed by a host of fears, he knocked at Alloway's door. It opened immediately, and he found himself face to face with a woman in the traditional fighting posture of her sex, arms akimbo, head up, and feet slightly straddled. Beyond her he could see Alloway, fully dressed, seated in a chair by the window, her gloved hands folded in her lap.

"Who is this, Alloway?" he asked while he still stood in the open doorway.

"It's Janet," said Alloway. "She locked the door and said I couldn't go."

"Who is Janet?" asked Bourne.

"You may well ask," said Janet, between her teeth. "I'll tell you who she is; she's nothing but the floor lady's maid, that's all she is."

"Oh no, Ritt!" cried Alloway, rising. "Don't believe that. She is my friend; she has cared for me as though I were her own baby. Don't you dare be rough with her. She's—she's just come back from nursing all her relatives through the flu."

"I begin to understand," said Bourne, his face breaking into a winning smile. "Good for you, Janet. You'll never regret it, never."

"That remains to be seen," said Janet, sticking to her guns. "Miss Alloway is nothing but a lamb, and no—"

She broke off with a meaning toss of her head.

"No wolf is going to wolf her while you're around," finished Bourne.

"You yourself said it," agreed Janet.

"Alloway," said Bourne, "go out in the hall and cheek the house detective when he comes; I want a word with Janet."

Alloway obeyed so quickly that Janet had no chance to clutch her skirt, still to hold her a prisoner. Bourne closed the door and turned to face the maid. "Would you like to stay with Miss Alloway for the next forty years of your life?" he asked, pleasantly.

"That depends," replied Janet.

"If you mean it depends on money, you may

have as much and no more than the best lady's maid you know."

"You know I didn't mean money," said Janet, coloring.

"Of course I knew it, Janet," said Bourne, taking her by the hand and leading her over to the window. "You can't quite, but you can almost see it."

"See what?" asked Janet.

"My father's house," said Bourne. "J. E. Bourne's house, where you and I and Alloway will be living—from to-night on."

"Your father's house, did you say?" asked Janet, and from that point Bourne took up the time, until Alloway knocked impatiently on the door, in giving minute directions as to the myriad things Janet was to do in the way of packing, moving, unpacking, and settling down, all in the course of two short hours.

"I'll fix it with the hotel," he said, hurriedly, as he made for the door. He dropped a bank-note on the bed. "Take ten taxis if you need them. I trust you."

"He trusts me!" exclaimed Janet, with irony, a moment later to empty space, and then, with a smile that was a mixture of cynicism and indulgence to the eternally egoistic male, she turned and went furiously to work.

Chapter Twelve

J. E. BOURNE'S offices occupied the entire twenty-first floor of a very high building. His own room was a corner one, large, spacious, and well lighted by four wide, low-silled windows, so that, sitting or standing, one gained a sensation akin to that of being perched in an eagle's eerie on an open mountain-side. The principal outlook, across a jumble of sharply differentiated roofs, presented a superb bird's eye view of the Lower Bay with islands and water laid almost equally flat, clearly cut as the lines of a profile.

J. E. had a theory of rooms in conjunction with work. He believed that a young man should labor between four blank walls, well ventilated at the level of the ceiling, but that, once past the bump of success and his fortieth year, he should have transcended the maze of detail and come out upon the plane of generalship and policies, graduated into the class of masters who paint with a broad, sure stroke, and that, having established his right to a place high upon the pyramid of the industrial hierarchy, he had an equal claim to open windows and a sweeping view.

"A man may measure his greatness any day," he had once said to his son, "by his capacity for

hobnobbing with the clouds without losing the grip of his feet on solid earth. Show me an old hand who can't work unless he's shut up in a silent tomb and you show me the eternal clerk. There are days when I'm mean and small, when I know I'm a draftsman again at fifty dollars a week. But there are weeks and sometimes months when I belong up here, when clouds are my natural pals by the right of the mountain climber. It is then I feel in my bones that I can see with the penetrating eye of God tuned down to human dimensions, but still high powered enough to take in an industrial plant, rip off its roofs, disclose it floor by floor, and map out the twists and turns in the minds of every man and woman in the hive. Without such flairs of generalship I couldn't be happy. Without my belief in a group of men who have attained to what you might call an earned elation I would lose faith in the ultimate welfare of industrial man."

"Just what do you mean by that?" Ritt Bourne had asked. "You have gone over me."

"I mean," said his father, "that there is a leadership which grows only out of turmoil. To give you an instance, the stereotyped attitude toward a strike for generations was suppression, pure and simple. The old mind looked at a

strike as an obstacle; the new mind considers it as a factor. Listen. Ten years ago I heard Jim Wallers say of Charlie Truebell that he was a damned fool, that in a tour of seventeen plants he hadn't visited a single mill, but had spent all his time in cafeterias, operatives' clubs, residential side streets, alleys, and back-lot playgrounds, and then had spoiled a good time in the special by sitting off in a corner to write his report on the biggest reconstruction scheme ever launched by the Boston group. The next day I secured Truebell as a partner at a guaranteed retainer of over a hundred thousand. I didn't take him on as a philanthropist, but because he had the new mind, the factor mind that doesn't rush at an obstacle, but rises to it. You know what Truebell is to-day, but you don't remember Jim Wallers—he's been down and out for half a dozen years. Now do you see?"

"I've got it now," young Bourne had said, with a thoughtful smile, "and I'll never forget it."

That conversation had taken place in J. E.'s high eerie and it was to this room with its clean, broad outlook that Ritt Bourne brought his bride at half past eleven in the morning of a glorious late-autumn day. He opened the door and thrust her before him; she took three steps

into the full light of the wide windows and then stopped. Her gaze, excluding all surroundings, focused solely on J. E.'s bulky figure. For an instant his gimlet eyes struck straight at her face with a penetration which was hard and intense, then slowly they softened and gradually filled to the brilliance which made one forget their smallness. Without apparent effort he rose from his chair to his full height, passed around his desk, and paused. He looked at Alloway again, not as one examines a picture offered for purchase, but with the caught breath of him who throws open a casement on green hill and vale at break of day.

Alloway stood very still, as though by long usage she were conscious of the power which her bewildering freshness exhaled. She was like a pale rose secured in its own loveliness and fragrance. She was the living, breathing denial of all arts, the embodiment of aspiration, a dream made carnal; but above all she was youth, tremulously alive, pouring the single strength of its great desire into the one present question of the soul.

J. E. felt her wide brown eyes plunge into his breast as though, if need be, they would tear their way to his heart. Suddenly he realized that this girl, outwardly so still and calm, stood,

in terror not of him, but of the shadow of the failure of her own appeal. He moved swiftly to her, took up her hands that had been hanging at her sides, and forced her to look at him.

"You are Alloway," he said, his eyes twinkling into hers, "my son's wife; as lovely a bride as ever man brought home straight to his father's heart."

The girl could not speak, but she nodded her head violently, freed her hands, threw her arms around his neck, drew herself up to the very tips of her toes, pressed her smooth cheek hard against his rough one, and hugged him tighter and tighter, clinging to him as to a strong and sure refuge. He felt the desperate, fluttering beat of her heart growing swiftly calmer, and presently he heard her murmur, "I was frightened; I was terribly afraid."

He wrapped his arms tenderly around her, blinked furiously to clear the moisture from his eyes, glared at his son, and cried: "Get out of here, young man. Stay away for half an hour." Then holding Alloway's slim figure in the crook of his arm, he led her to his favorite window and said, "Look, my dear."

She threw up her head. "How lovely! How far one can see!"

"That's it," said J. E., with quick approval,

"how far you can see if you only get high enough. It's going to be like that with you and me. No ugliness, no details. We will meet each other only high up where I know in my heart you have lived all your young days and where I shall climb again if you'll only give me a hand."

She slipped her hand into his as though in immediate acquiescence, pressed closer to his shoulder, and it was thus that Bourne the younger found them standing in silence when he broke in at the end of an impatient quarter of an hour and embraced them both in a great bear hug.

"Alloway," he whispered, loudly, "it strikes me that this job is pretty well done for. I told you there was nothing to it."

J. E. disengaged himself with a sigh and returned to the seat behind his desk. "You may say there was nothing to it," he said, as lugubriously as a boy, "but I wish it were all to do over again. I would put up more of a fight."

"Don't say that, please," cried Alloway, running to perch herself on the arm of his chair. Leaning toward him, she whispered, "You haven't kissed the bride."

"Alloway, *please* come," cried Ritt from the door.

"Where do we go now, Ritt?" she asked, a moment later, as they descended in the elevator.

"Home," he whispered, so loudly that the other occupants glanced at them and smiled.

When they had entered his father's best town car he cried, "Home," again to the driver, but as they threaded their way through the traffic Alloway slipped her hand inside his arm and said, almost sadly: "No, dear, we'll have to go to the hotel first, and I must finish packing. Perhaps it may take me an hour."

Bourne leaned over and whispered once more, this time in her ear, "Home!"

They arrived at the house in Murray Hill, and Bourne dismissed the car; then he took Alloway's hand and led her formally up the steps; but before he could ring, the door flew open and Simon bowed low to his new mistress.

"Stand up, Simon, and look at her," said Ritt, proudly—"Mrs. Rittenhouse Bourne."

Simon drew straight as a ramrod. Alloway turned her head and smiled over her shoulder directly into the old man's face. His pale-blue eyes filled as though she had touched some secret spring, and tears trickled slowly, almost sedately, one after the other down his pink cheeks.

"He's caught it," said Bourne, with a laugh. "He's weeping like the rest of us, for joy. Now watch and see if somebody else doesn't do the selfsame thing."

"Not me," said Alloway, firmly. "I'm not going to cry any more to-day."

"Any more?" asked Ritt. "I haven't seen you cry to-day; not really cry."

"Oh, but I did," said Alloway, "inside!"

She stopped and looked around her. They were in the wide entrance hall. On one side a square arch opened on the spacious vista of drawing and dining rooms, on the other a small door led the eye to the deep shadows of the library. A stairway paneled in oak rose with three right-angled turns in easy sweeps to the floor above.

Alloway's brows puckered. "Why is the stairway paneled?" she asked. "It must have had pilasters."

Bourne stopped and stared at her. "Will you never get through being a wonder?" he asked. "The stairway was paneled fully twenty years ago, on the occasion of your husband's discovery that he could shove his head between the widely spaced palings, but couldn't pull it back again."

"Oh," said Alloway, patting the smooth oak, her brow still furrowed to some unanswered puzzle. But presently it cleared. "Did you do that too, Ritt?" she asked. "I wish we could have been babies together."

"I do, too, dear," said Bourne. and, with his

arm around her, led her up the stairs and down a long hall which ended in a door that seemed to open on a garden of light. They passed into what had been his mother's own sitting room, freshly done over in chintz so that it carried him back completely to what otherwise would have been a faded memory.

"What a perfect room!" breathed Alloway. "It is like all the sweet women I would like to know."

"It is your own room," said Bourne, simply, "the room where I shall always knock before I enter. The door yonder leads to your bath and the one beyond to our bedroom. Would you like to see it—the bedroom?"

She nodded, and he led the way to throw the door open for her. She approached cautiously, peeped around the post, saw with amazement a familiar garment, threw an inquiring glance at Bourne with a birdlike movement of her head, ran into the room, and threw out her hands.

"My things!" she cried. "All my things are here! Oh, Ritt dear, how sweet you are to me! how thoughtful! I love your great big house. It is big enough to dream in. If one were only light enough upon one's feet and heart one could be a fairy, it is so very big and kind."

She nestled in his arms.

"No new furniture," he murmured.

"No new furniture," she echoed.

"No going back to the old hotel."

"No going back to the old hotel."

"Not for a minute."

"Not for a minute."

"No packing."

"No packing."

"No unpacking."

"No unpacking."

"No loneliness ever any more."

"Oh, I *hope* no loneliness ever more."

"Now that's settled," said Bourne, in a firm voice, "I'm going to turn you over to Janet."

"To Janet!" cried Alloway. "Oh, Janet! Janet!"

Janet came into the room with a great flurry of skirts and starched apron. "Yes, Miss Alloway."

Alloway rushed into her arms and tumbled her head on her bosom. "Oh," she gasped, "I'm so glad you're here! I've been wanting something really soft—"

Bourne hurried away, wandered rather aimlessly through the house, finally entered the library, and stopped suddenly with upthrown head and a look of astonishment at finding his father there before him, pacing up and down

with his hands clasped behind his back and his head sunk on his chest.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Ritt. "How did you get here?"

J. E. looked up; a fine smile lit his heavy features and vivified his eyes. "Ritt, my boy," he said, "I don't know when I've been so excited. I came up on the Subway. I couldn't stay in the office. It wasn't that I couldn't wait to tell you that I'm absurdly proud of you and of her; it was more than that. I remember once before making a fool of myself like this. I was fishing in Scotland and just crossing a bridge when I saw a girl standing in water up to her waist on the very verge of such a jumble of broken rocks as only a Scotch river can boast.

"A great brawny gillie was holding her up for dear life with both arms and she playing a mighty salmon with all the strength of her solid mind and lissome body. Five times she brought the fish up for the gaff and five times the gillie didn't dare let go of her. And her face never changed, boy; she never said a single damn. Just fought and lost and fought again. That's when I turned fool. I dropped my tackle, jumped up and down, and started yelling at her. I wanted the gillie to drag her backward to the bank.

"While I was yelling, what I was afraid of happened. The salmon took the bit in his mouth for a last rush and shot downstream and under the bridge like a bullet out of a gun, with the high song of the reel for the screech. We thought it was all over, but as the line ran out the gillie picked up the girl like a sack of potatoes and made for the shore. All the way in, leaning at right angles from his shoulder, she continued to attend strictly to business, and when she got her feet on solid earth again she taught the crowd that had gathered on the bridge, including your dad, more about fishing than was ever put down in books, and when it was all over and thirty pounds of gasping salmon lay gleaming on the bank, all she said was, 'Stand me on my head, Mackintosh; my waders are chock with the water.'

"It was a great and wonderful sight, a battle that ought to go down in song and story, for she wasn't a husky wench. She was gentle and bore a great name. Well, I may be just the same old fool to-day, but I can't help it; I've got to tell you that you have still to play fine and easy before Alloway is safe home in the landing net. God give you a steady and a light hand, boy. Don't press. Take your time. Ride yourself on the curb. Your heart's in it;

give your head a chance. If you lose her I'll never forgive you."

"But I can forgive you anything," said Ritt, warmly, "for saying just that. Father, it's great to have you with me; it's the greatest thing, next to Alloway herself, that has ever happened. I don't mind telling you that I'm frightened to death and not too proud to take help."

"Well," said J. E., "you remember I told you I knew why she went to that ball? I said you'd have to find out for yourself, but I'll play traitor to her just this once. She dreamed her way to that ball. Her mind is the perfection of the imaginative type. Look out for it. Now I've done it; now I've told you. Think it out."

"I believe you're right," said Bourne, thoughtfully. "She knows everything in the world about dreams; she has all the wisdom there is in wind, water, or a spray of apple blossoms, but fire hasn't scorched her anywhere."

"She has all that," said J. E., picking up his hat, "but if at any time you begin to lose hope, remember the even balance of the mind some seer gave her for a seventh birthday present. Now I'm off again."

Ritt followed his father to the front door, and then wandered away through the familiar

rooms of the old house, loitering in each to picture Alloway in one and another homely setting. In these subdued and sober haunts of crowding memories she would appear as a nebulous light, shedding the intangible radiance of a comet's plume. He could see her thus; but when he tried to seize that fanciful vision and mold it into flesh and bone, subject to the harder usages of life and to those leveling laws of nature which are no respecters of persons, his effort seemed to him to fall short of realization and he was afraid.

At one o'clock he sent to ask if he might lunch with her in her sitting room. He found her in a negligée of such ravishing yet delicate revealment that he turned his eyes away, abashed. She was standing, waiting for him, one hand resting lightly on the back of a chair. She studied him with a whimsical smile for a moment and then asked, "Why did you send to know if you might come to me?"

"Because in these rooms you are yourself," he said, meeting her eyes squarely.

"I understand you," she said, after a thoughtful pause. Her brows drew together in an effort for expression. "You mean," she continued, "that there is a personal domain, an individual castle of the soul, and it must have an inanimate

symbol like this room, a tangible refuge. Ritt, I don't need it to-day."

The age of all womanhood shone in her words and in her eyes. He felt a hot rush of blood to his temples. "What do you mean?" he asked, in a low voice.

"I mean," said Alloway, steadily, "that I cannot bear to have you afraid of me or to think of me as something cold or fragile or just a little inhuman. Come here. Lay your hand on my neck. See how warm I am."

He took both her hands in his, raised them and crushed her fingers to his lips. "Your eyes see into my heart," he whispered.

"Your hands are strong," she said, "but they are gentle. Why should I be frightened? I am not afraid to be near you." She looked up at the forward thrust of his head and at the firm set of his jaw. "You are the lover I have known for years; the handsomest man, the dearest boy in the whole wide world!"

He loved the smooth turning of her head at the maid's knock on the door and the calm and gentle manner of the freeing of her hands. She moved easily, taking possession of herself and of all her surroundings, and when, a few hours later, she swept in *grande tenue* into the drawing-room where he and his father and Miss Livingstone

were already waiting, he could have kissed her feet for the unconscious charm of her apology for being late. "It's because I was married to-day," she said from her innate truthfulness and with a breath-taking simplicity. "There were moments when I didn't think how time was passing."

J. E. took her hand, drew it through his arm, and patted it as he led the way with her into the dining room, but as they crossed the threshold she snatched it away to clap in girlish glee at sight of the large, snow-white wedding cake which shone in strict accordance with all the rules of marriage lore, amid the four high table candles. It was a gay dinner, a human dinner, a dinner such as young men would gladly build for with bricks of blood and bone, and old men count themselves happy in single recollection.

It might have been expected that three in that company should have opened a closed ring and with the best of intentions made a suitable niche for the newcomer, the stranger, in their midst; but the will to put Alloway at her ease, if it ever existed, had evaporated at the moment of her first appearance. It was she who, in the singleness of her heart, revivified the flame upon the ancient altar of old-fashioned friendship. Those things which were elemental in the girl, her

youth, her abiding freshness, her unclouded purposes and untarnished vision, like the soft glow of the high candles, established a radiation which lit up the faces and the inner fires of all those who came within the circle of her wizardry.

Chapter Thirteen

SO informal a gathering of friends could scarcely retire to the stately drawing-room; as though by one accord, it passed on to the wide hall, hesitated, and then, led by J. E. himself, entered the hallowed precincts of the library. Upon crossing the narrow portal which gave upon the broad world of books, Alloway stopped in her tracks and threw up her head to a familiar odor. It was the gesture of one whose childhood has been blessed with a fragrant hedge, and who ever after, in youth, maturity, and tottering age, will stop stockstill with dilated nostrils at the pungent smell of clipped box.

She was wearing a tulle dress that was like a cloud of deep-brown smoke; she raised her pale hands and gleaming arms and pressed them into its softness at her breast, her head turning very slowly, her eyes oblivious of all but the serrated rows of volumes imposing their presence above the quiet, odorous atmosphere of worn leather. She made an appealing movement toward Bourne, her lover, drew him to her, and, with her hand placed lightly on his arm, passed slowly along the laden shelves. Here and there she

paused to greet a book with a caressing touch as one who meets an old and dear friend.

J. E.'s blood pounded in his veins; he felt an access of jubilation which lit up his heavy face with a boyish exuberance. He was standing beside Angela just within the door, and they were both watching Alloway with the intensity with which one might spy upon a sprite serene and unconscious in its native forest. He leaned over and whispered, happily, "The girl is library bred, Angela; she's library bred."

Miss Livingstone nodded, but did not take her eyes off Alloway's figure moving within its cloud of tulle amid the harmonious browns of oak and leathern chairs and calf-bound tomes. Everything in the room seemed to lean toward her, to absorb her into an intimate fellowship, a jovial yet dignified companionship such as undying age might share with the spirit of eternal youth.

Suddenly she paused, drew quite erect, clasped her hands before her, and cast a pleased, radiant glance over her shoulder at her companions in the room. She had come upon a piece of Chinese porcelain standing in isolated grandeur upon a pedestal of ebony in the angle of two walls. She moved swiftly toward it, knelt on the low arm of a great chair, and leaned forward, her head thrown back, her eyes slanted down as

though to caress the painted scene imprisoned forever in the glaze with the flooding worship of her understanding gaze. The others drew near to her and stood divided between admiration for her pose and for the beauty of the object of her adoration.

She touched the scene depicted on the beaker with the tip of her pink finger nail. "This is an old story," she said in a bell-like tone, "a very old legend. Shall I read it to you?" she asked, not lifting her eyes from the picture in the main reserve of the porcelain piece.

"Please do," said Angela, quickly.

"Yes, Alloway," said Ritt Bourne, excited with the thought that his father was so soon to follow one of the flights of the girl's fancy which had so entranced himself, "tell us the story."

"The picture," began Alloway, "tells of one, Wang Chih, of whom it is recorded in the seven books of wisdom that he lived long, long ago in the days of the Tsin kings. He was a humble woodcutter, and one day, having wandered into the mountains of K'u Chow to gather fagots, he spied a grotto, entered it, and found some aged men seated there intent upon a game of chess. He put aside his ax to watch the game, and presently one of the old men handed him a thing somewhat like a date stone in shape and told him

to put it in his mouth. No sooner had he tasted it than he became oblivious of hunger and thirst. After a space of time one of the players looked up and said: 'It is long since you came here. You had best go home now.' Whereupon Wang Chih, stooping to pick up his ax, found its handle moldered into dust and himself wearing a long white beard, so long that it trailed upon the ground. He went hastily to his home and found that centuries had passed since the day when he had left it for the mountains of K'u Chow and that no trace of his kinsfolk remained. It is a very old story," she concluded.

"Old!" exclaimed J. E. "Why, it's so old that its shadow crept to the Catskills a hundred years ago."

"My dear," cried Angela, "where have you learned these things?"

The animation in Alloway's face became fixed as though it had been chilled into immobility by a breath of frost. Both Bourne and his father made a movement of tentative protest. There was only a second of silence, however, before the girl said, in direct answer, but almost dreamily: "Where does one learn one's memories? I wonder."

She drew close to Bourne, slipped her hand through his arm, and looked up into his face as

from a sudden oblivion of all else. In a moment, in a flash of her brown eyes, she became warm and present to his touch. Forgotten were fantasies, legends, and all the gossamer web of mystery she had chosen to weave about herself. In spite of her abnormal pallor, she was real. She pulsated visibly to the happiness of the moment, and, gazing with the trustful fearlessness of an untrapped fawn into her lover's eyes, she flaunted, unashamed, the open secret of her heart. J. E. and Angela stared at her in amazement, wondering by what short road she had arrived at the consummate wisdom which changes a subject by the veering of a mood.

"You two children must be tired," said J. E., taking Alloway's hand and raising it to his lips while his eyes looked steadily into hers. "Run along to bed. Angela and I want to sit by the fire and talk."

Alloway stood on tiptoe to kiss him, said good night to Miss Livingstone, and drew Bourne toward the door. While she was yet on the stairs Angela followed hurriedly after her, pushed Ritt aside and put her arms around the girl. "My dear," she whispered, "your loveliness chokes me. Forgive an old woman. Take my advice; stick to your guns; never tell; never tell us. Only, I do want you to love me."

Alloway smiled at her, a wise little smile, already mixed with dreams. "I decided to love you at the dance," she murmured.

Sitting in the great leathern couch before the fire, J. E. and Angela kept silence for a long time, then on the same impulse they raised their eyes and studied each other's faces for half-hidden thoughts.

"Where can she have come from?" said Miss Livingstone, finally.

"How wonderful of her to come!" countered J. E.

"That's all very well," said Angela, impatiently, "but it doesn't help to know that she is incredible; it only makes it worse. If I should dream myself married, John, and in possession of a dream-daughter, I would wish her to be as straightforward, as free from veneer, and as untouched by the thousand and one hypocrisies of the humdrum mask of life as this extraordinary girl with her amazing possession not only of herself, but of you and of me and of what we thought we alone stood for. But I would be afraid to have her quite so beautiful in her pallor or so sudden and far in the flights of her fancy. I couldn't have faith enough in my own strength to hold her. I've been trying to compare her, and I'm desperate; she is a denial of all the girls I know."

"There are lots of girls," said J. E., thoughtfully, "in and out of what you think of as society, who are genuinely good at heart and would rise to a refreshing plane if environment gave them half a chance. It's the age they live in that has made ducks and drakes of what used to be their points of vantage. Women have scrapped the old plant before they built the new. What they lack in particular is an accent to their clothes and beauty—some break, any break from the smooth running of the standardized model. And, beyond that, they need the mustard seed of imagination which alone can sustain the flight of any fancy. You see, I have named the two things you would have feared in your dream-daughter. To me Alloway is nothing more wonderful than a belated bloom on some old and sturdy stalk. How she came to happen, though, is as deep a mystery as ever and I, for one, am content to take her on her own terms."

"You may be," said Angela, "and I tell myself that I am, too, though I don't know just how long I can hold sheer, plain-faced curiosity by the throat. But what about Ritt?"

"You're right there," said J. E. "You've put your finger on what worries me, Angela. A lover and a closed door have always been sworn enemies. But that's Ritt's battle and he'll have

to fight it. You're a woman. What do you think of her? Does she truly love him or will she wake up as so many girls nowadays seem to do, as though they had been married in their sleep?"

Angela thought for a moment before she answered, "Women know certain classified things about one another. They can tell a cat, a hoyden, a Mrs. Grundy, or an apple with a rotten core across a room at the first meeting, but it is rare for one woman to know another as you or Ritt have probably known a dozen women."

"That's the most extraordinary statement I ever heard you make," exclaimed J. E., turning his head to stare at her. "It also runs countercurrent to an old saying which we men have always accepted without cavil, to the effect that we can never know women."

"You can't," said Angela, laughing, "in the sense of telling where they will jump next, or in the sense of their whys and becauses. That isn't what I meant. I mean this: Take two women who are close friends and both of whom know you and trust you, J. E. Bourne. They will tell you intimate things, things rooted in their hearts and wrapped into the fiber of their suffering lives which they will never breathe to one another. To her woman friend a woman is

what her friend has grown to expect her to be; she isn't a hypocrite; she really lives in that accustomed mask as one might occupy the same house at fixed periods of the year. But the same woman will open to any man for whom she has both affection and faith a dozen doors into those subterranean channels which intersect her very foundations. She will run to a woman with petty confidences, certain troubles, and some half truths that she truly believes to be whole; but to a man she doesn't give or ask, she *surrenders*."

"You mean," said J. E., "that Alloway is more apt to open her heart to me than to you."

"In a way, yes," replied Angela, already wearied by her own logic, "and with a difference. John, you think of her as the lingering spirit of a generation. That is nice of you; it opens a door on your own lasting faith. You ignore the fact that women know no generations. Only the medium changes through which their eternal sameness makes its chameleon manifestations. You lived and still live in one woman and see all the woman of her time within her own radiance. I love you for it, John. Does it frighten you to have me tell you so?"

"No," said J. E., a strange flush passing over his face. "It doesn't frighten me; it's the dearest and closest thing anyone has been able

to say to me for many years. I thank you for it. But you couldn't have said it a week ago, Angela; nor could I have dreamed a week ago that I would throw open my wife's rooms to-day to a newcomer, but not to a stranger—not to a stranger. That girl has done things to us. I can see you again in pigtails and remember how I hated you in school, and, somehow, remembering it makes me glow with affection for you now. I told Ritt I was going to get a lot of fun watching your face to-night, but it was like looking at a reflection of all my own thoughts. She didn't put us to shame, exactly. What did she do?"

"I'll tell you, John," said Angela, with a whimsical smile at herself, "she accepted us."

"So she did," said J. E., after a pause, "into our own garden, too." They kept silence for a moment and then he continued, "Angela, didn't you get a feeling of walking in remembered paths, of meeting face to face the happiness of your own youth?"

Angela drew a long breath. "Yes," she said, "I got that feeling, and now I'm going home to put it away in my ribbon box before I lose it. I'm so glad you let me be with all of you to-night."

"Without you," said J. E., rising with her, "something would have been missing, some-

thing more than just yourself. Is it the horses to-night or the motor?" he asked, as he rang for Simon.

"The horses," said Angela. "Thank goodness I had the instinct not to drive to this dinner in a motor."

"Never give up your horses, Angela," said J. E. "If you get hard up, come to me. Every time I see a coupé with its inevitable bays waiting in the side streets of the 'teens, forties, fifties, and sixties, or here in Murray Hill, I say to myself, 'New York still lives.' And every time I see them drawn up at the ponderous portal of a certain ancient institution of feminine commerce I say, 'New York still keeps faith.' You won't give them up, will you?"

"Never, John," said Angela, laughing, "especially if I am to come to you when I'm strapped. You have guessed it; they are the link which holds me to a tradition from which I make my excursions into to-day and Coney Island. Your mind has been hard on me sometimes, hasn't it?"

J. E. laid his hand on her shoulder. "Never," he said with absolute sincerity, and then turned as Simon entered. "Miss Livingstone's carriage."

On the following morning, when Ritt Bourne came down, hoping to catch his father at break-

fast, Simon announced that J. E. had gone, leaving a message that he had been called away and would be absent for a week. Ritt wandered into the library to think this news over; he realized that his father's departure had not been as fortuitous as J. E. would have had it appear. The son was accustomed to reading a meaning into the least of his father's actions, and in due time came to his own conclusions regarding this sudden journey, in all probability at great inconvenience. He was filled with a glow of affection and soaring admiration for his father at the thought that, being a man of vast affairs, he could still hold those things paramount which concern themselves not with food and raiment and the high cost of living, but with the main chance for happiness between two mortals.

He went back thoughtfully to where Alloway lay, still asleep in the great four-posted bed which seemed to hold her as upon an altar. The window curtains were not yet drawn open, and in the dimly filtered light she appeared to shine as though, waking or sleeping, an undying flame kept vigil within her body. One pale arm, bare to the shoulder, was upthrown beneath her head. Its gleaming curves lost themselves in the loosened flood of her tawny hair, which shone with the dull but living glow of old gold.

Her eyes were shut tightly, like a baby's; her red lips were barely parted and seemed to flutter tremulously to the even rise and fall of her breasts, faintly molded beneath the soft whiteness of her girlish nightgown. To Bourne she seemed infinitely virginal, as though love were but the accolade of purity. A misty memory of his mother and of having knelt beside that bed years and years ago assailed him. With his heart thick in his throat, he sank to his knees and, with hands clasped and outstretched, fastened his eyes on the face of his beloved.

As though he had called to her, Alloway awoke, her eyes filling slowly with the perception of the exaltation on his face. Her hand stole out from its nest of gold, crept into his, drew it to her, pressed it above her heart. "Ritt my darling, my own boy!" she whispered.

"Oh, Alloway," he cried, blinking the tears from his eyes and smiling, "I'm so glad you are awake! It isn't fair for you to sleep without me."

She laughed, bent her dishevelled head, and kissed his fingers; then she looked him in the eyes and asked, quite soberly, "Do you love me?"

"I love you so much," said Bourne, fervently, "that I'm afraid to sleep for fear I'll lose the

dream of you. I'm like a man to whom the gods have given the perfect gift on condition that he watch them so closely that they can never steal it back. I shall go mad with loving you, my darling; but it can't be helped and in the meantime I like it."

"If that's the way you feel," said Alloway, content and smiling, "you had better call Janet before you run away. She'll watch me for you until breakfast."

For a week the old house played the role of a forgotten isle amid the lost Islands of the Blest. Its placid, silent front presented an impassable barrier to the curious world, while its dignity seemed to assume all responsibility for the shamelessly light-hearted nest building that was going on within its portal, which opened once each day to free its inmates for a flight abroad and once each evening to take them in again. They went eagerly, they came back gladly, for within the hushing walls they had found a whole new world through which they wandered hand in hand, like children, on breathless journeys of discovery along dim halls to dark, threatening nooks in cellar and in pungent attic. From these tenebrous outposts they would rush back in assumed panic to the cheerful light of Alloway's sitting room. She would

throw open its door and stand poised for a moment with shining eyes and with hands clasped upon her thumping heart.

"Look!" she would cry. "It is like a garden in full bloom."

But there were soberer moments in the twilight of the dying day when Bourne would sit with her in the broad window, seize her and crush her to his breast, kiss her and murmur broken phrases embracing all the baffling vagueness of his hopes and fears. "You are my own, yet not my own. You have come from nowhere to fill my heart, and if it should wake to find you gone where would it rush to find you? Nowhere. Nowhere."

"Ritt!" cried Alloway. "Oh, Ritt!" The tinge of animated life went out of her cheeks, leaving them dead white and bloodless.

"It is true," said Bourne, rushing on. "You yourself are real; you are here in my arms. I cannoy deny you; I cannot disbelieve you, but I can tremble when my heart tells me you are a visitor held only in part."

Alloway struggled erect within the circle of his arms and turned her face to his. "Take me, crush me, kill me!" she cried, her eyes flashing. "What have you not had of me? What do you still wish? I am no longer Alloway; I am

your wife. Shall I call back the dream-girl for you, just to strip her filmy clothes?—just—just to shame her?"

"Forgive me," murmured Bourne, striving to draw her unyielding body to him again. "You are the wonder of the world and I a ragged pilgrim. Forgive what I have said and sometimes forgive my eyes. Don't be hard to me or my heart will break. If I hold the present truth of you, what else matters? You yourself cannot lie; you would never lie to me."

Her body relaxed in his arms with the finality of collapse. "What if I have lied to you?" she asked, with a peculiar calmness. "What if all of me is a lie?"

"You dream-child of mystery," cried Bourne already happy in the repossession of her person, "how could you lie? You are the very cup of truth held to my lips. I will drink of you so and so and so," he whispered, kissing her eyes and brow and hair, "and I will fill my veins with belief."

Each idyll, as each week, has its appointed end. J. E. came back to bask in the new radiance of his home, but not to renounce old habits. He was one of those men who are too busy ever to be in the way. He came, and with his coming the house assumed an air of satisfied completion; he went, but with his going he was never al-

together gone. His presence, especially in the library, had a lingering power which was in itself a promise of his return. On his first meeting with Ritt and Alloway he radiated a nervous satisfaction, as though he found himself freed of foolish fears, but on later occasions his shrewd eyes sometimes dwelt on them with a persistent questioning behind their scintillating veil of brilliance.

Almost immediately after his arrival Boies Stephen presented himself at the office and asked urgently for an interview. J. E. received him at his first free moment.

"Well, Boies," he said, "sit down for a moment. What can I do for you?"

"Shall I tell you straight off the bat, Mr. Bourne?" asked Stephen.

"That's the best way," said J. E., smiling. "It will prepossess me in your favor."

"Well, sir," said Stephen, promptly, but coloring at the effrontery of his request, "I would like to buy Long Leg Hole."

J. E. tapped the blotter on his desk rhythmically with a paper cutter. After a pause he looked up at Stephen again, and when he spoke his words showed how long a road his thoughts had traveled.

"Boies," he said, "there isn't enough money loose in this country to buy Long Leg Hole. No, don't apologize," he went on, raising his hand to forestall an interruption. "I like you all the more for wanting to buy it. It speaks well for Long Leg Hole and better for yourself, and it gives me a chance to say a thing or two to you. One of them is this: the reason why so many people build when they could buy something ready made for much less money is because there have always been, and please God there always will be, souls that demand tailor-made clothes."

Stephen's eyes lighted up as though flashing a message to the effect that his quick brain had snatched up all of J. E.'s meaning.

"Another of them is this," continued J. E. "You can't buy or rent a tradition, but you can breed a baker's dozen of them in as many years if you'll begin with your own foundations. My advice to you and Amelie is to carve your own Long Leg Hole somewhere, anywhere, from Mother Earth; to save what she gives in the way of shade trees, and to plant your own fruit, not because it will be cheaper than market stuff, but because there's no sweeter way of measuring the years or a child's age than by the growth of an uncropped apple tree. Traditions,

my boy, are not all gray bearded; they are the grip of any home on a man and a woman and their young; the essence of all those things which last and which, being born in fire, keep green in ashes."

"You have given me much more than I came for, sir," said Stephen, rising. "I won't thank you for it; I'll go out and do better than that. Before I go, will you tell me what's become of Ritt? We parted with some pretty strong talk, but he's not the sort to hold anything like a grudge to the extent of not letting his friend eat dirt. I've called up the house three times and been there twice, but Simon has been too much for me. He says Ritt is away, but I'm sure I saw him driving his car and the pick of the peach crop up the Avenue no later than yesterday morning."

"Ritt is holding no grudge against you," said J. E., promptly, and then paused. "The truth of it is, Boies," he continued, as though he had come to a decision, "he has forgotten you and the world for the present. The girl whom you saw with him is his wife."

"His wife!" gasped Stephen, his eyes starting from his head. "When could he have done it? Who is she? Am I Rip Van Winkle? Have Amelie and I been at Long Leg Hole for ten days

or ten years? Have you heard whether they have put my boy in college? How many children have they?"

"Who?" asked J. E., following his invariable rule of giving his attention first to the last of a string of questions.

"Ritt and his wife," explained Stephen, earnestly.

"They were married a week ago yesterday," said J. E.

"A week ago yesterday!" repeated Stephen, blankly. "Who was she? I'll take my oath I never saw that face to forget it."

"No," said J. E., easily, "I can't imagine anyone forgetting her or her face."

Stephen looked at him with something of J. E.'s own brand of shrewdness. "Mr. Bourne," he said, "Ritt is my best friend. Is it all right with him, and with you, too?"

"Boies, I don't blame you," said J. R. "I'll tell you, without speaking for Ritt, that she walked into that door and became the apple of my eye five minutes after she was married."

"After she was married," repeated Stephen.

J. E. nodded. "By the way," he said, as Stephen turned in a daze toward the door, "I kept it out of the papers as her wedding present."

"Does that mean I can't tell Amelie?" asked Stephen, dully.

"Not at all, Boies," said J. E., smiling almost compassionately. "Tell her all you know."

"All I know," repeated Stephen with a twisted smile. "Thanks."

"You'll both be unhappy until you meet her," continued J. E. "I can't tell you much myself, but I can say this—that to me and to Angela Livingstone, for instance, the girl answers all questions in herself."

"I'm glad you say Ritt is all right," said Stephen. "I remember that the last time he was down at my place I had my doubts. He was full of a cock-and-bull story about a girl that cried at him in an elevator."

"That's the one," said J. E. "She cried at him again and he married her, and I want you to know, Boies, that he did a good job and that it's putting it mildly to say I'm proud of him, and of her, too."

"Even so, I wished it on him," said Stephen, cabalistically, and departed.

Chapter Fourteen

BOURNE was too much in love for his own happiness; he had never learned all the pitfalls which beset the path and condition of possession. Like most of his sex, he had passed from year to year and from age to age taking things sensatory for granted. Few men, though they have all the facts at hand, ever visualize to themselves the truth that the body has a personality and a life of its own independent of the soul.

Ritt had once listened to a masterly analysis of this very subject, pronounced by the greatest authority of his day, in the incongruous surroundings of a small ship's smoking room during that hour beyond the rules when the steward leaves the lights on for a favored lingering group because he himself is interested in the conversation. But on that occasion the youth that was Ritt Bourne had not absorbed the sayings of the great man as capable of practical application. He had been tremendously interested; but as if to prove the theory which was being expounded to his deaf ears, his attention had been fastened on the extraordinary imposition of thought over an unfriendly atmosphere rather than on the force of the argument.

A scandal had taken place on board, and while the group which was gathered in the smoking room happened to be of the quality which does not discuss women, there had occurred a sudden hiatus in the conversation which each felt was due to the same cause, the same indirect suggestion that had set the minds of all those present to thinking of the girl in the case.

Into this pause the great man had interjected his sonorous voice. "The human body," he said, "has a life of its own, independent of the soul. All the bodies of all the women in the world are violins upon which we men have played; some of them coarse in grain and heavy to the touch; some of them sound and clean of line; and some as light, as packed with the music of the ages, as tender and as everlasting, as the thin shell of harmony itself. To the knowing player the body has no commerce with the soul; he lifts the living fiddle to his cheek and, eyes intent upon the great illusion, his deft fingers fall lightly on those stops ordained to nature's uses and, in the measure of his skill and its own capacity, the marvel in his hold gives forth its appointed sound. It may be low and deep, it may be high, thin, and shrill, but to some it has been given to hear, utterly dismayed, the tune of immortal love rising by sweep and throb to the paradox of sudden death and a

cracked sounding board. I say the love cry of the body and the sob of the soul are not one; they are divided. I say that the wreckage of a broken fiddle may have its peaceful halo, shining supreme above the sorry plane of vengeance."

He stopped, and in the silence raised his glass to his lips, but did not drink. A frown gathered on his brow, and as though the impartial balance of his trained mind refused to leave any case half stated, he replaced the glass on the table and continued. "And now the player," he said. "I remember a great master and the night of a great wager. We were all invited guests and all men, as befitted the occasion of a bet. A go-between had said to the master, 'Ribeau has wagered a hundred thousand francs that if you will come to dine to-night you will play unasked for his guests.' It was an insolent invitation. The master considered it for a moment and then, accepting its challenge, said, incisively, 'I shall come; I will not play.'

"We were twelve at table, including the guest of honor, and throughout the meal our host steered the desultory conversation clear of every reference to music. I cannot tell you what we talked about; I only know that the keynote was premeditated banality. After dinner we were led to the drawing-room, where we had engaged to

stay till midnight, if the wager were not settled earlier. As we crossed the wide threshold the eyes of all of us fell upon a violin lying on a bare table which stood in significant isolation in the middle of the room. An angry flush mounted to the brow of the master; the rest of us smiled, except our host. He continued without a break the inane patter of the dinner conversation.

"We stood about for a while, but gradually one and then another of us drew near to the violin. We didn't touch it or mention it, perhaps out of some idea of fair play; but speaking for myself, I can say it was because I recognized in the instrument the lost Stradivarius which had been recently sold to an unknown purchaser at a fabulous price. It was old with an unwithering age. The mottled brown, shading here and there into black, of its deep-bosomed arch, seemed to have taken on the texture of living bronze, and yet, so delicate were its merging curves, that it appeared a thing so light that a breath might waft it away.

"Needless to say we all watched the master out of the corners of our eyes. At first he was blustering in his feigned indifference; then by visible gradations the battle which was going on in his breast came out into the open and showed

its progress in nervous laughter, twitching eyebrows, bulging eyes, strangely fluttering fingers, and a dozen other indications of a deep-seated commotion.

"The moments grew tense and, drumming through their pulsating stillness, came the monotonous voice of our host clinging tenaciously to its string of platitudes. No one paid any heed to him, least of all the master. Gradually a prepossession seemed to seize upon him; he sidled absorbedly toward the violin and, without looking down, discovered it quickly by touch alone and dragged a trailing finger nail across the four taut strings. They were accurately tuned. Amazement and then a comical terror filled his face at the unexpected rightness of the notes. They hung in the breathless air like a memory of bells, widely spaced, each interval a blank world of unwritten music pleading for birth.

"For a moment we thought our host's wager won, but as though our assurance had waked him from a trance the master rushed from the room into the adjacent hall, snatched up his cloak, clapped on his quaint beaver hat, started toward the door, stopped, whirled, and returned as if he had been dragged back by a lariat. His cloak slipped to the floor and with both hands outstretched he went straight to the violin,

picked it up tenderly, raised and nestled it home. For one instant the old man and his hat were ludicrous; the next, they were sublime.

"He caught up the bow, and at its first long-drawn stroke a plaintive, throbbing, waking cry quivered as from some time-locked source of omnipotent life. The master lifted his face; tears were pouring down his cheeks. He played a harmony as illusive yet as individual as the disembodied ghost of the genuis who had stored it in so fragile a wooden shell. All music poured from the tiny cavern, swelled to an overwhelming flood, mounted chord upon chord to an incredibly aching sweetness, and suddenly burst the bounds of the finite, cracked as to a pistol shot, and died against the wall of eternal silence. With a wailing cry of anguish the old man dropped to his knees beside the wrecked violin, and there we left him with our host's trembling hand laid reassuringly on his shoulder."

The speaker paused, but did not look at the rapt faces of his hearers. "So with the player who trails a careless finger across the strings of the human fiddle," he continued, "and finds himself snared in the trap of mastery. He can no more stop short of possession than can a flowing river refuse to find the sea."

Words, only words, and yet, had they been present in Bourne's mind during these first few weeks of his marriage, they might have given him a single truth, standing like a fixed point, against which he could have measured the speed of the flood that was bearing him toward individual disaster. They might even have served as a landmark to guide him into deep but tranquil waters, for Alloway's nature was peculiarly malleable. She might have responded to reason, though with a sigh, had reasoning been his mood. But it was not. He had accepted in good faith a strange girl's fanciful stipulation that he should possess her only from the moment of their first meeting, but now the Ritt Bourne who had made that light-hearted promise seemed to him a vague, far-away person and the girl who had exacted it a distant though lovable creature unrelated to blood and bone.

That was it. He and Alloway had become real. Without renouncing dreams, they had stepped boldly into that realm of bodily unity which, beyond all other human relationships, resents the merest implication of division or withdrawal. She herself had become living water, yet he knew parched lips and a devastating thirst for the unknown sources from which she had sprung. A madness fell upon him, the mad-

ness that must have all of the thing it loves even at the price of killing.

He became subject to fits of depression following so swiftly upon moments of absorbing exaltation that Alloway was first bewildered, then frightened, and finally felt herself glowing with a slow, steadily mounting anger terrifying in its impersonal, detached intensity. She looked upon this strange, new emotion within herself with startled, unbelieving eyes, as though she stood helpless before a distant but rapidly approaching conflagration.

It was some days before she began to sense, at first vaguely, the true source of Ritt's unrest, and then her anger was overwhelmed and lost in a feeling of numb despair which rapidly crystallized into a determination to stand by the guns of fancy she had mounted in so daringly playful a mood and fight them in dead earnest. Her youth fell from her spirit, though not from her body; the imagination upon which J. E. had seized as the keynote of her mind, from a wand became a weapon which she wielded with deadly effect, leading her lover-husband by reminiscence of one far and colorful scene after another deeper and deeper into a bewildering maze.

Just as some trifling event or fleeting impres-

sion occurring in childhood may lay the foundation for a mature life of tragedy, so had the inspiration of Bourne's theory of mystery as a holding power taken possession of her brain at the formative period of her awakening into love from maidenhood and destroyed all other and truer values. She became overnight a woman full grown, a woman of one idea upon which centered a host of vagaries by which she attempted to divert and entrance Ritt's mind without setting it at rest.

One day she turned on him. "You are not fair!" she cried, her lips trembling, her eyes flashing. "You break your promise with your eyes and hands and in your mind even if you try to keep your lips from speaking the things we said we would never ask. Sometimes you make me feel very small, as though to be your wife and your playmate and plaything and even a slave willing to kiss your naked feet were quite a little gift."

She threw out her hands and dropped them at her sides with a falling forward of her shoulders, assuming an attitude of abnegation and despair. Her head drooped and her eyes glazed with the look of the wounded hart. Bourne threw himself at her feet, wrapped his arms about her knees, and buried his face against her. His whole

frame was shaking with still-born sobs which died in the dryness of his throat, wracked him and choked him.

"It must be because I love you," he whispered, hoarsely, as though groping for lost foundations. "Forgive me, Alloway, my darling, my own girl. I didn't know that love could be such a brutal thing. Sometimes it beats my body with flails, drives me mad and makes me turn to rend you, as though by tearing you apart I might find the nooks and crannies still hidden in your soul. My darling, I *do* love you; my heart is bursting because I love you so."

She sank to her knees within the circle of his arms. "Then take me, Ritt," she whispered. "Hurt me, dear; kill me; only smile first, laugh first, kiss me." She became all tenderness; her arms twined themselves about him, drew his head down to her breast.

The white heat of these battles, ending always in a paroxysm of mutual surrender without capitulation of the point at issue, carried with it its own peculiar strain which had the effect of stripping from them both the normal resiliency of two personalities in sane though intimate contact, and left them overtrained, stripped to the nervous fiber of a feverish existence. But there were moments, even days, when sudden lassitude

would fall upon them, and, lifting, would set them free to laugh and trifle happily with life. Those were days marked with a big red letter when they would escape from themselves into the rapidly searing country and play among the gray rocks and the pungent, drying grass of the hilltops like veritable children of Pan frolicking madly among the swirling leaves of autumn.

Out of this spirit of joy Bourne seized one day an inspiration. Obsessed subconsciously by an unswerving desire, he conceived the idea of laying out a hypothetical map based on all the casual allusions to distant spots on the earth's surface which Alloway had let fall, and then to carry her away on a long tour, following as accurately as he could the actual steps of her life in the hope that she would betray herself or be betrayed by some collision with the past. The cunning he displayed at the inception of this scheme went far to prove that he was indeed a madman imbued with a superhuman shrewdness.

As they lay on their backs on a flat rock just comfortably warmed by the sun of a rare November day, he raised his arm and pointed at the clouds. "Let's pick out the ones we were born under," he said. "That's east and that's north; so you know south and west. I pick that

bulgy, lazy cloud over there. It's hanging over Murray Hill."

He had turned to watch her face with an avidity which forced her to give more than casual attention to his request. Her eyes wandered first to the east, wavered, and then dropped. "I was born under no cloud," she murmured. "I was born at the meeting of night and day."

By the grave expression of her face he knew that there was a meaning buried deep in her words, could he only fathom it. For that occasion he was content, but on subsequent days he made other essays of a like nature and pieced his results laboriously together as one tries out the sections of a jig-saw puzzle until he felt sufficient assurance to produce the great atlas on an evening when they were alone in the library and propose a new diversion.

"Let's travel," he said. "Let's travel the whole world over."

"Oh, let's!" cried Alloway, clapping her hands, hurling herself on the big couch before the fire and tucking her feet beneath her.

He drew up a low table, spread the atlas open at the map of the world, sat down beside her, and seized her hand. "Now shut your eyes so you can't cheat, and we'll see where we begin."

He made a pointer of her slender forefinger, carried it through the air in wide circles which rapidly diminished until he plunged it down.

"There," he said. "You didn't cheat, did you? It's China."

"*I* didn't," said Alloway, laughing, "but what about you?"

"China," repeated Bourne, disregarding her accusation and turning the leaves of the great book rapidly. "Here we are. We'll start somewhere on the coast. Everybody does. You say where."

"One can only start from Shanghai, if one starts at all," said Alloway, enigmatically.

He led her a great tour through China, visited place after place familiar to their many long talks, crossed to Japan and into India, flew off at a tangent to Rio and the River Plate, came back and approached New York by some uncharted air route vaguely depicted. Long before they had finished the journey Alloway's face had experienced a peculiar change of expression, at first wondering, then doubting, and finally fully convinced. She lost interest, her eyes wandered, and presently she arose and stretched her arms in feigned weariness.

"I'm tired with so much traveling," she said. "Let us go to bed."

"And to-morrow we'll pack," said Bourne, looking up at her with a peculiar fixity.

"What do you mean?" asked Alloway.

He laughed nervously. "I mean just that, you dear girl. We are going to pack for that very trip. Don't you *want* to go?"

Alloway looked at him intently. "No," she said, after a pause, "I do not wish to go."

"Oh, Alloway," he begged, rising and putting his arms around her, "please go! Please play my game! Oh, darling, please don't spoil it! I want it so much and I'll be so good, so very good."

She denied him again and again and with each denial he returned more fervently to the attack, petting her, pleading with her, caressing her with all those arts of the lover which break the wills and the hearts of women. She melted slowly in his arms; question chased question across her features, but in the end it was an expression of terror which lay like a transparent shadow superimposed over the yielding and yearning tenderness of her face.

"You wish it more than anything else?" she asked.

"More than anything else," replied Bourne.

"I will go," murmured Alloway in so low a tone that he could scarcely hear her, and then

clung to him with such trembling hands and such a quivering of her whole body that for a moment fright made him forget his hard-won victory.

"My darling," he whispered, "what makes you shake so? Why are you afraid?"

For a moment she did not answer. She dropped her face against his breast and pressed closely to him. "Twice I have lost the big round world and found it," she said, finally, in the same low and far-away tone. "I am afraid of losing it again and finding a marble."

"What do you mean?" asked Bourne, unsmiling, intent.

"You do not understand; you have not understood," murmured Alloway, lifting her face and smiling into his eyes; then she released herself and cried, gayly, "Come, I'll race you to the room."

She flew up the spacious stairs like a disembodied sprite, but the heart of the child in her was panting to bury its head in a pillow.

All the following day Bourne rushed from one office to another, studying time-tables and sailings, securing reservations and stopping here and there to make a purchase. He was troubled over the mood in which Alloway had given in to him, but, nevertheless, he was in feverish haste to be off and put his fantastic scheme to the test.

He had seen his father and had talked to him for the first time in his life with conscious mental reservations. J. E. had subjected him to such a gimleting from his penetrating eyes that for a moment his son was tempted to be done with half truths and tell his father all the madness and the hope for a cure that was in his heart; but it was J. E. himself who prevented the revelation by a measured judgment.

"You are right in one thing," he said. "You must either go to work and make a business of settling down, or travel. If you can't do the one thing, there remains only the other."

For some occult reason Ritt Bourne felt that his father had intrenched himself behind reservations also. The words he spoke were full of sober sense, but they had a metallic ring which lacked the full tone of an expression from the heart. They were not hypocritical, but gave the impression that J. E. realized that his son was face to face with a situation in which he himself could not further meddle to any good. It was as though he had sensed the fever in Ritt's veins and perceived with one flash of his mental vision that it must run its course.

While Bourne was rushing about town, completing his arrangements, Alloway sat in her bedroom, listlessly superintending Janet's pack-

ing. The maid looked up frequently from her work to study her mistress's face with growing dissatisfaction. She found upon it an expression of wistful sadness such as it had not borne even in the loneliest moments of her long sojourn at the hotel.

"You are not very keen on going this journey, are you, Miss Alloway?" she asked.

The girl always smiled at this form of address, so suggestive of a conjunction between respect and affection, which Janet had continued to use in spite of the marriage, apparently from some vague intention of asserting rights in her mistress prior and superior to those of the other servants.

"Not very," said Alloway.

Janet dropped over a trunk hanger the garment she was about to fold. "Are you happy? Are you?" she asked, with a suppressed intensity quite foreign to curiosity.

"Oh yes," said Alloway, easily, and rose from her chair. "I think I'll go out and buy a thing or two," she continued, dressed herself in an inconspicuous traveling suit, and left the room and presently the house. Simon, glancing at her absorbed face, suggested the car, but she refused, saying that she preferred to walk. He watched her until she reached Madison Avenue, where she paused, looked at her watch, and then

turned uptown, walking swiftly, her head erect. She disappeared from his view and from the house in Murray Hill; she did not come back.

Bourne returned very late for lunch, looked into the dining room, and then hurried through the house in search of his wife. He was keen to talk to her, anxious to infect her with the exuberance which he had begun to feel and which had eclipsed the forebodings aroused by her reluctant acquiescence to his plans. When he learned that she had gone out to shop and had not yet come home he was conscious of a feeling of disproportionate disappointment which, as the grandfather's clock on the stairway landing chimed the first quarter and then a second, changed to annoyance and finally to alarm.

He questioned Simon as the last member of the household to have seen her, and without thinking what he did walked hatless to the corner and looked up and down the street as far as the eye could reach. Presently he came to himself, returned hurriedly to the house, left orders that he be notified of his wife's return, and went lunchless into the library. For an hour he walked up and down, arguing with himself that Alloway had been merely delayed, that she had become interested and forgetful of time and that she would return now at any moment. "The

door will open during this turn," he would say to himself, and whirl quickly on his heel with a look of strained expectancy on his face.

But the door did not open, and when two hours had passed he rang for Simon and changed his order. "When my father comes, Simon, tell him I'm in here," he said. Then he sat down with his chin cupped in his hands and waited without the movement of a muscle or the flicker of an eyelash. His brain was divided; one part of it was in a turmoil of search for unused expedients, of speculations and impotent striving toward a solution which continued to elude it. The other part was quite calm and said to him, with monotonous repetition: "I told you so; I have been telling you it would happen. Stop your questioning. It's no use. No use."

Chapter Fifteen

J. E. entered the library slowly. It had hardly needed the anxiety on Simon's face or his hushed message to bring home the fact that a disaster had befallen. The house itself seemed a robbed shell, a darkened habitation from which the life blood had been suddenly sapped. Silences John Bourne had never before noticed, save on the day of terror which had witnessed the passing of his wife, seemed to smite by contradiction on his ear. He had stopped deliberately in the hall and listened for Alloway's laughter; but instead he heard the silences, picked them out as one might pick out vacancies where familiar chairs and tables had once stood.

He walked up to his son and laid his hand with a light touch upon his shoulder. Ritt leaped to his feet, stared at his father, and then sat down again heavily. "She has gone," he said.

J. E. nodded, drew up a chair, and seated himself. For an instant a look of weariness and disappointment clouded his brow. He drew a deep breath, and after a long pause spoke. "I can't help you," he said, "without reproving you first. There is only one way in which you could have

hurt Alloway—you must have bruised her imagination. How did you do it?"

Ritt kept silence for a moment; then he leaned forward in his chair and stammered his way into his story. Presently it came with the rush of an unloosed flood. He poured out to his father all the tale of his unreason and its mounting madness up to the evolution of his scheme for a voyage of discovery aimed solely at disclosure of Alloway's secret.

He locked his hands between his knees and twisted them until the joints snapped. "And the worst of it is," he said, "that I knew for what ruin I was headed, and couldn't stop. I felt it again and again in my heart. I felt it on the first night of my meeting her, when she seemed to me a miraculous visitor. I knew it, yet I couldn't stop; I couldn't keep myself from trying to break her wings so that she could never again fly away along the path of fancy to the hidden place from which she came."

The utter despondency with which he spoke aroused J. E. to an effort toward comfort. "Don't rush to meet trouble," he said. "We may still find her; she may even come in at any moment."

Ritt shook his head. "You know you do not

believe that any more than I do. Wherever she came from there she has gone."

"If she were any other woman," said J. E., "I would say to wait and she would surely send for her clothes. According to Simon, she took nothing, not even a hand bag. But with Alloway it's different. I won't lie to you again. I believe that the hope of your finding her soon lies mainly in the strength of the love you have planted in her heart. In the meantime I want you to feel at rest on one point. I shall employ every means at my command to find out for you which way she has taken and where she has gone. Have no worry on that score; there is nothing that you can think of that I won't do."

Bourne passed that night in the library, not because he expected Alloway's return, but from an instinct for penance and in the desire to find himself again, to drag himself back to those fixed standards of comportment from which he had been swept by his surrender to an unbridled desire for unlimited mastery. As he looked back even from the vantage of only a few hours of retrospection he was dumfounded at the chasm which his bereavement had opened between his present sober sanity and the headstrong, unthinking, and untender paroxysm of selfishness

which had found its culmination in a last straw of unjust demand. It seemed to him utterly incredible that he should have wounded a thing so airy, so yielded into his power and so beloved as the girl who had come to him as the one great gift in the hand of God, the breathing body of a young man's vision. He was filled with a great revulsion; his spirit seemed to arise and turn its back on his body.

When J. E. entered the room in the early morning, according to his custom, Ritt got up and stood erect before him. "Father," he said "I'm going to Long Leg Hole. I have an account to settle with myself. I don't know whether Boies and Amelie are still there, and I don't care. If I find they're in the way, I'll turn them out. In any case, if you want me, if there's any news, that's where I'll be."

J. E. nodded his ponderous head. "Perhaps I didn't make it clear last night," he said, "that I had finished with rebuking you. I have, my boy. There isn't a fiber in my body that doesn't ache with the wish to help you—and Alloway. Long Leg Hole or anywhere else, keep her with you. I like to think that we Bournes measure the love our women have borne us by our own constancy. It sounds a strange phrase, but it expresses exactly the thought I want to share with

you; it's not our love, but theirs, to which we must do honor to triumph."

"I shall keep her with me," said Ritt, simply, his face showing white after his long vigil.

He moved toward the door. "A moment, Ritt," said his father. "I must bother you with one question. Did Alloway have money with her and do you know how much?"

Ritt stopped and turned very slowly, a puzzled frown on his brow. "It's an extraordinary thing, sir," he said, "but I don't remember ever speaking or thinking of money with Alloway. It shows you, doesn't it, that we truly lived with our dream; that she was something to me just beyond the range of the measuring rule? Only, now that you ask me and have made me remember it, I can tell you that she has always had money; money to buy what she wished when I wasn't with her, to give to Janet, and to leave lying around."

"That's all," said J. E. "Run along. A cold bath and then food and lots of cold air. Handle yourself sanely; take her with you."

Ritt followed his father's commands until he was well out upon the open road, and then for a space he abandoned himself to the full extent of the power of the car, hurling it forward at such vertiginous speed that he found himself catching

his breath spasmodically and with aching contractions of his throat. Gradually his recklessness subsided and from that point on he drove ever more slowly until, buried deep in thought, he passed beyond the fronded entrance to Long Leg Hole and, when he noticed his omission, had to drive on along the narrow country road to find space in which to turn.

He came to the crossways just beyond which he and Alloway had left the car to climb to High Rock on the day when he had won her. He stopped now and stared at the weather-beaten signboard with its two illegible fingers pointing along the acute angle of the two roads. Presently he turned the car and drove as rapidly as the rough way would permit to Long Leg Hole. With mixed feelings he saw Boies Stephen's touring car parked in a thicket of trees and knew he was not to be alone.

As he walked toward the house Amelie rushed out, hatless, to meet him, calling, "Hello, Ritt!" warmly as she came and at the same time trying with both hands behind her back to untie her fluttering apron. He noticed a peculiar change in her face from all the years he had known it. The deep brown eyes, almost blackish, were the same, as was the high color in her cheeks and the dark gloss of her wavy hair; yet the expres-

sion of her features had undergone some basic modification which robbed them completely of that self-sufficient detachment that had made her at one and the same time the most affable and unapproachable of women. So it was also with the tones of her voice. It seemed incredible that the voice which had said, "Hello, Ritt," coolly and politely at irregular intervals during all their lives, without ever leaving a mark on memory, should have emitted this clarion call of good fellowship, interest, and welcome. Bourne was suddenly glad that she was there; not until he heard his own sigh of relief did he realize how much he had resented her presence with Boies at Long Leg Hole.

Amelie's first move was to look curiously at Ritt's car, and then all around with one of those swift, sweeping glances with which women are wont to register instantly every item in any panorama that interests them for an intimate reason. Her eyes failed to find what they were seeking, the amazing wife of whom Boies had told her so little, and came quite suddenly to rest on Bourne's face.

There they stayed. She said not a word, and yet in the long moment during which she looked at him he felt her growing tender in the reading of his catastrophe, not as men read by word and

line and page, but as women comprehend wholly and at once with equal heart and eye. Her face sobered, retained its softness, yet seemed to abjure sentimentality. The calm, practical Amelie of other days was by no means dead; she took Bourne's hand as frankly as she would have grasped that of one of her own babies and led him off to the house.

"I don't know where Boies is," she said, as she forced him into a comfortable chair and then went about her business. "He's been starting out at daybreak lately to take tremendous tramps. He's cataloguing all the places where motor cars can't go. You know, we are going to find and build a Long Leg Hole of our own."

"No?" said Ritt, his interest aroused.

"Uhhm!" mumbled Amelie, testing the consistency of some mixture by letting it drip from a wooden spoon. "We'll keep an apartment in town for dead winter and school and that sort of thing, but in the summers we will build, slowly. Every time Boies finds a likely place he drives me as near as we can get to it on the next day, and we look it over together and talk and plan and get excited and argue and quarrel and make it up again and—and grow young and foolish and—and like it."

Ritt smiled in spite of his abstraction. "You seem to be very busy," he said.

Amelie flashed a glance at him and laughed a low, chuckling laugh. "Very," she said. She dropped the spoon into the big yellow bowl of batter and turned toward him. "And it's all due to you," she continued, "to the mad streak in you which I had never guessed when I called you slack water. When Boies comes I'm going to put my arms around you and kiss you if you don't mind."

A spasm crossed Bourne's face and passed, leaving it peculiarly calm. "I wouldn't mind ordinarily, Amelie," he said, with a frank sincerity which stood out stark against the background of her kindly banter, "but to-day I couldn't stand it, even from you."

Amelie's face grew grave with a sweetness he had never before seen upon it. She took off her apron, laid it aside, drew up a stool, sat upon it close beside his knees, but not touching him, and waited. He glanced down at her and for an instant a flush mounted to his cheeks while he hung poised between annoyance and an aching desire to accept her gentle invitation and pour out his heart. In the end he chose a middle course; he laid trembling fingers lightly upon her shoulder.

"Not to-day, Amelie," he said. "I want to, I really do; but somehow I can't."

"It's just as well, Ritt," she said, rising quickly, "because Boies is coming. I heard his whistle. But remember this, boy—I can help you. I don't know why, but I feel it. Perhaps it's just because you first helped me."

She went to the door and passed swiftly from his view. He braced himself to face a boisterous welcome from Boies, but, as moment after moment passed and he remained undisturbed, his tense features relaxed and with a feeling of warm gratitude toward Amelie he realized that her understanding had already begun to serve him.

Boies came in finally. "Hello, Ritt, old man!" he said, holding out his hand. "No use telling you Amelie and I are mighty glad to see you. Come and wash up and let me give you a fresh shirt. What do you mean by wearing a stiff collar out here?"

"I didn't think," said Bourne, "but I've got a bag out in the car that Simon packed for me, and he's sure to have done the right thing. I'll fetch it."

The two friends walked out together, and with the instinct for tapping another man's surest sources of enthusiasm which was one of his most

lovable characteristics, Bourne said, "Amelie tells me you're looking for another Long Leg Hole."

Stephen stopped in his stride and his eyes lit up. "We are, Ritt," he said. "We're looking with both our hearts and our heads. I shall never be able to tell you just how much we owe to you and to your wonderful old man and to Long Leg Hole; I won't even try. You'll have just to accept it as something that is tied into the years you and I have knocked around together and that will show up only with wear like the bottom strings in a jolly old carpet. We have found one or two places that will certainly do, but we are making sure that there is no better. Do you want to know the greatest good I've got out of the search?"

"What is it?" asked Bourne, obligingly.

"The visualization of the years ahead," said Stephen, promptly, showing that he had thought the matter out. "We Americans, Ritt, your sort and mine, have lost the roundness of life. We are all specialists, experts walking a tight rope. Even when some Johnny gets a glimmering of the fact that something is wrong, what does he do? He specializes in going back to nature as if he had been bitten by a specific bug and had to take a specific cure. All this

may sound like rot, but I know exactly what I'm trying to say. I'm trying to show you that when a man sits on a gray rock at the edge of a wooded building site, with his woman at his side, and starts to study out his years as an accumulation and not as the first lap of a relay race, he is on the road to discovering the round ball of the whole world within the little maze of the thing we carelessly call home. Do you get that? It's a bit highbrow."

"I get it," said Bourne, unsmiling. He picked up his bag and they returned to the house.

"By the way," said Stephen, in sudden discovery. "If you've come to stay, where do you sleep? Or are we evicted?"

"Not at all," said Bourne. "I sleep here, on the couch."

Both Amelie and Boies stared at him, confused and puzzled. He stepped to a pillar at the side of the room, pressed one of the floor boards, which released a spring, lifted the facing from the upright, and revealed a high roll of canvas arranged on a spool. He drew it out, carried it around one of the two stanchions which supported the broad sweep of the heavy roof beams, turned at right angles and fastened it to a row of hooks on the wall at the head of the couch,

remaining himself within the privacy of the quickly constructed room to change his shirt.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" he heard Stephen exclaim to Amelie. "So *that's* what those hooks are for!"

After the midday dinner he left them, wandered about the place aimlessly, and then struck out for High Rock, beckoning from across the valley. He reached it and climbed down to the ledge where he had sat with Alloway so many æons ago, where he had first kissed her, first dared to take her in his arms, and whence they had looked upon the whole world spread like a gay carpet and crying out for their feet to come down from the ethereal heights and tread its flowered pattern. That day seemed very long ago; he looked upon it now as one gazes in one's mind at some remembered scene of beauty. The keen wind, whipping the last leaves from the tracery of the bare limbs of naked trees, was no cleaner or sharper than the spaces of his mind and vision. The fever had gone out of his blood, the madness from his brain.

Sitting on that roof of their own lost world, he saw Alloway and he saw himself as they had been when caught in the maelstrom of their own emotions, carried on the turbulent crest of a spillway of wasted waters, a thing of grandeur in

itself, but flowing to no noble ends. For the first time in the too-hurried days of his winged flight above the plane where human feet eventually must tread he saw Alloway, the tender stranger, in the full proportions of her native strength, and measured all the length and breadth and the amazing profundity of the individual river of life which she had poured recklessly once and forever from her heart. "That's how love is given," he muttered, brokenly, and thought long on the sorry part he himself had played.

He asked himself what mattered it by what road she had come from her hidden land of fable, pale flesh grown warm from out a mist of dreams, and upbraided himself again and again, not for having loved and taken her so passionately, but because in the fire of the great test understanding had failed him and robbed him of the enduring power of those who are steadfast in waiting. He had been guilty of running amuck among the still flowers of a walled garden, of breaking butterflies' wings, of striving to sweep up the star dust from his own heaven.

At this thought he sat suddenly erect to the realization that Alloway's wings had escaped his destroying clutch. For whatever reason, the

strength of her single purpose and desire had outmatched his. In that nowhere to which she had returned she was still whole, still endowed with all those minute realities of person which, finding their roots in the deep soil of generations, endure through stress, turmoil, and suffering and stand at last in unity like the evergreen column of a cypress, serene above the time-stained tablets of the little dead.

Not for a moment did he attribute to her any hysterical deed; whence she had come, there she had gone, and no farther. He knew it beyond even the birth of suspicion. Being life itself, concreted for the renewal of one man's faith in a triumphant aspiration, she could do no other than keep tryst with her own destiny. Somewhere she walked with beating heart pulsating in the white temple of her body, placid of brow, wistful of face, and with the sadness of a new memory, ineffably sweet and bitter, written deep into her luminous eyes and anchoring her illusive spirit to the very human rock of this world's grief.

That thought dragged him to his feet and to a despondent gesture of half-lifted arms; it made his heart all but burst with an access of new longing for her. Realizing his impotence, he turned, climbed the rock, and fled from the

cruelly vivid visualization of her deep-breathing reality and human nearness. For a while he crashed blindly through bracken, brush, and thicket; then his pace steadied gradually to a long, purposeful stride which devoured mile after mile and brought him back by the sweep of a wide circle of the rough hillsides, exhausted, but outwardly and inwardly calm, to the log cabin at Long Leg Hole. Boies and Amelie, wrapped in coats and rugs, were sitting star-gazing at the verge of the deep, mirrorlike tarn.

"You'll find your supper at the back of the stove, Ritt," called Amelie. "We had ours ages ago."

"Thank you, Amelie," he called back. "Good night to you both."

He entered the house, went to bed, and slept. Day broke, Boies departed, and the early-winter sun was well along its low arch across the heavens when at last he awoke to the rejuvenated eagerness of a healthy body, only to have his unfounded elation sink swiftly back to the bed-rock level of a dreary outlook robbed of any saving gleam of hope. Nevertheless, he slipped on an overcoat and, calling to Amelie to keep to the house while he had his bath, he ran to the edge of the overhanging rock, stripped, and plunged headlong into the icy water. He

struck out with a furious energy, and, responding to the call, his chilled blood grew warm, moved, raced, and finally tingled in his veins. He plowed his head through the cold flood until the whole intricate mechanism of his overstrained nerves tuned itself to a new accord with a universe stripped to its hard and primal attributes, but somehow infinitely enhanced even in its desolation.

When he came in and had dressed, Amelie served him as she had served Boies on the occasion of his first meal in that house, but with no spirit of rebellious or teasing banter. She moved about the austere interior with a quiet dignity, as though the weeks she had spent there had imbued her with some of the occult grandeur which attends all simple things simply done through sympathy with the basic tasks of life. She had become graceful not only in action, but in underlying spirit, and when he had done eating, his eyes meanwhile studying her with a puzzled curiosity, it was with a supreme naturalness that she took him by the hand, led him to the freshly made couch, and made him sit down beside her. She turned eyes full of a soft gravity upon his face.

"Ritt," she said, "tell me everything or I shall scream because you will not let me help you. I know I can help you."

Chapter Sixteen

RITT unburdened his heart, but not as he had done to his father, for there is a subtle difference in the way a man talks of the woman he loves to any male, however near to him, and the way he approaches a woman of whose sympathy he is sure with the selfsame story. In relating to his father what had happened he had brought to bear all his powers of narrative and introspection, piling one detail upon another in orderly sequence; but with Amelie he unloosed emotion and sensation by vivid flashes and left it to her instinct to illumine the dark reaches in between.

"Ritt," said Amelie, when he had finished, "women aren't different from men by fits and starts, but deep down and steadily. For instance, a man likes to say, 'I shall be on deck early, every morning, before breakfast,' or, 'I shall be at the turn of the lane at ten minutes after four,' but the girl never willingly says she will be on deck early every day, or walking in the lane in the afternoon. Without telling even herself, she intends to be there, but she would so much rather the man would learn to find her without words or a fixed time-table. It's in these trifling things of so much importance that

men never learn patience. They wish to take no chances, but the girl is willing to play with fate for the sake of her belief in the reading power of love. Do you understand me?"

Ritt nodded, but did not speak. "This lovely girl," continued Amelie, "whom you have lost from sight hasn't gone very far in the flesh; before another day is over your father will have found out where she is. Probably all he need do is to persuade the hotel people to show him the register. I can't imagine the girl you have pictured premeditating a false address. Can you?"

Ritt started and looked at Amelie with a gleam of admiration and hope. "You are right," he said, and half arose, as if to start for town at once.

She drew him back beside her. "Wait," she said. "Are you quite sure you are ready to find her?"

"What do you mean?" asked Ritt.

"I mean," replied Amelie, "that if you try to rush in again on the same ground on which you lost her you will not find her. Don't you suppose that she knows as well as I do that you can trace her down? Ritt dear, the part of her which you have missed can't be taken by assault; her flesh isn't waiting for you at all. I believe that to-day, wherever she is, she is as free from that

sort of aching as a bird in midair. But that doesn't mean that her spirit may not be standing with arms held as wide as the whole wide world."

"If they are," said Ritt, hoarsely, "you needn't worry. I sha'n't fail her again."

They sat in silence for a few moments, Amelie thoughtful and Ritt nervously glancing at the door as though he were impatient to be off.

"Do you realize," she said, laying her hand again on his arm, "that you haven't once mentioned her name to me?"

He paused for an instant and then said, "Her given name is Alloway. Her last name was—"

"Alloway!" interrupted Amelie, quickly. "One couldn't possibly know two girls of that old Scotch name; it's too unusual."

"Of course not," said Ritt, absently.

"I mean," continued Amelie, in her old-time practical voice, "that she must be Alloway Rittenhouse Schuyler, the daughter of Eben Rittenhouse Schuyler who died over a year ago. He was a second cousin of your mother's and an extraordinary recluse. He was quite awfully rich, married his coachman's daughter, and because his world was rough to her he built a new one in her heart and never left it but once. Ritt, don't you remember Alloway?"

Bourne's face was deadly white; he was

crushing Amelie's fingers in his hand and staring wide eyed and blankly before him. "I don't know what you mean," he said, in so low a voice that she barely heard him.

"It must be all of twenty years ago," continued Amelie, evenly, "just before your mother died. I'm too young to remember of myself, but I've been told that your mother had a premonition of her own end, and as it approached she did a number of quite wonderful things, deliberately, weeks before she went. This was one of those things: She sent for all of her acquaintance whom she knew to have had some great trouble in their lives and talked to each one of them singly in that adorable room I saw once only and have never forgotten. They say of her that all her life she had lived within a deep well of peace and that she considered it a legacy which she might bequeath to those who most needed it. Eben Schuyler made his only visit to town, after the death of his wife in childbirth, because your mother sent for him. He brought his little three-year-old girl with him, and while he talked with your mother the three of us played in the big hall and on the staircase—Alloway, you, and I. Don't you remember her, Ritt?"

Bourne was sitting very erect, his face alert

with a breathless anticipation of recollection. "Go on," he said.

"She was a lovely child," continued Amelie, "the loveliest child I have seen in all my days. Her beauty didn't seem real, but at the same time you knew it could never pass as the beauty of so many charming babies does pass away with their growing up. I was a very little girl, but I remember touching the spun floss of her hair with a sort of passionate ecstasy. Her eyes were incredibly round and brown and grave. They took in the whole world and buried it so that you felt it was quite lost from sight. Whatever you told her to do, Ritt, she did, not bravely, exactly, but with a sort of unafraid faith, and when you dared her to push her head between the banisters she did it, and when she found she couldn't get it out again she almost tore it from her tiny shoulders, but never uttered a sound."

Bourne leaped to his feet. "It was I who did that," he cried; "it was my head that got caught."

"Don't be silly!" said Amelie, impatiently. "Your head was years too big. I got frightened and screamed at the top of my voice, and your mother came quickly from her room, one thin hand raised against the wall and the other clinging to Mr. Schuyler's arm for support. As

soon as she saw what was the matter she stopped and pushed him forward. It was the last time I saw her. I remember she seemed not pale, but transparent, a shining woman, if you know what I mean. As soon as Alloway had been saved she rang and gave orders to have the whole stairway paneled in oak. Don't you remember?"

"I remember," said Bourne. "I remember it now." He stood very still, staring before him, and drew a deep, quivering breath. "It is like a dream that one has forgotten and then tried to piece out again. I got it wrong; I thought it was my head and that the little girl was looking on. I only saw her that once, and for years I've believed that she was only a fancy."

"I'm not surprised at your believing that," said Amelie; "she *was* like a dream. Her father hurried off home with her. Immediately after that your mother died and all was confusion. Only we four had seen the child that day, and you and I never saw or heard of her again. I wondered, though, what had become of her when I read about her father's death. It happened while you were on the other side."

"I read about it, too," said Ritt. "I remember thinking what a gloriously individual life the man had lived and envying him a sort of tri-

umphant self-sufficiency. You put the same thought much better when you said he built a world for himself in a woman's heart. Amelie, just one thing more; there was a village mentioned in the strange obituary that said so little and told so much. Do you remember its name?"

Amelie frowned. "It was something very familiar, something biblical like Jericho, or Goshen, or Gilead, or—"

"I've got it!" gasped Bourne, suddenly. "It's—why, it's only just over a hill or two from here."

He snatched up his hat and rushed through the door. So unreasoning was his haste that he completely forgot his motor car. He ran all the way down the rough incline through the woods, but when he came out on the level clay road he slowed his pace to a quick walk. He thought of the car presently, stopped and half turned; then he resumed his walking, lengthening his step to the reaching pace of four miles to the hour. He had decided that he would rather not rush at Alloway and her sleepy village in a motor car.

When he came to the familiar crossways he stopped to stare at the weather-beaten post with its two fingers of fate pointing along the divided roads. He remembered now the nervousness, only subconsciously noticed at the time, which

Alloway had shown on the occasion of their first ride as to which of these two ways he was going to take. Feeling thereby reassured in his conviction that he would find her at the end of the other road, he turned into it with quickly beating heart and resumed his rapid stride.

He was dumfounded at the simplicity and the completeness of the revelation of Alloway's mystery. The more he thought of the strange adamantine character and paradoxically romantic history of Eben Schuyler, the more he realized that the unsullied flower which had continually astonished him even while it won his love could have sprung from no other soil than the cloistered nook where the recluse, scholar, *gourmet d'esprit*, and supernal lover had built his temple to the steadfast heart.

In due course he entered the outskirts of the quaint village which was his objective. He stopped and leaned on the whitewashed palings which fenced an old-fashioned garden where a child was playing amid a swirl of fallen leaves. Two men and a woman passed separately while he waited, but there was a fineness in his mood which made him wish to learn what he needed to know not from withered maturity, but from fresh and budding lips.

"Hello!" he said, presently.

"Hello!" replied the child, having first valued his smile with grave eyes.

"If all the leaves in all the world fell into your garden, what would you do?" he asked.

The child considered for a moment, and then answered, with youthful practicality, "Play wif 'em."

"No, you wouldn't," said Ritt, with a solemn shake of his head. "They would bury you as deep as the sky and I would have to jump over the fence and save you."

"How?" asked the little girl.

"With a broom," he answered, promptly.

She glanced around her and frowned. "What broom?" she asked.

Ritt looked up into the towering elm above his head. "With this tree," he said, gravely. "I'd turn it upside down and use it for a broom and sweep and sweep and sweep until I swept all the leaves in the world away."

The child looked intently at the great tree, sighed deeply with satisfaction at the wonderful answer, dropped the leaves her hands were clutching, and ran to the fence where he was standing. "Tell me a story," she said, with sure instinct.

Ritt smiled down at her. "Not now," he said; "not to-day. I'm very busy this morning. Has Miss Alloway ever told you stories?"

The child nodded. "Yes," she answered, and then added, with a coy, ingratiating twist of her head, "When will you won't be busy?"

"After I've talked with Miss Alloway," said Ritt. "But I don't know where she lives."

The little girl looked up in surprise. "She lives in the big house," she said, doubtfully, as though she believed he must be joking.

"Which big house?" he asked, gravely.

She hesitated, studying his face, then climbed on the lower rail of the fence and, stretching one fat arm across the palings, pointed a little way down the street at a long double avenue of elms, graceful even in their denudation.

"There," she said, leaning over so far that he feared she would tumble.

He went along the wide village street until he came opposite the double avenue of trees, and then turned sharply to look down the colonnade. At its end gleamed a stately house, one of those masterpieces of simplicity evolved by the Colonial mind. Its square front was surmounted by a wide-winged gable supported on high, fluted pillars of perfect proportion, massive in girth yet giving an impression of aspiring lightness gracing the brow of dignity. The broad steps and the shallow veranda were relieved, as was the glimmering whiteness of the whole structure,

by the oblong patches of leaf-green shutters, and the entrance door itself was one of those gems which still reward the eye of the rare unhurried traveler through the byways of New England. From the extremities of the two wings of the house a high privet hedge extended its length to right and left, half veiling the red brick of a vast walled garden.

Ritt approached the door with slow but unwavering steps; he raised the heavy knocker and let it fall. After a moment's interval an old woman wearing bowed spectacles and a lace cap opened to him, and he felt a quivering smile of surprise and disappointment cross his face. He had been braced to meet his wife face to face.

"I have come to see Miss Alloway," he said, quite simply. "Can you tell me where I'll find her?"

"She's in the library," said the old housekeeper, holding the door only half open, as though in doubt as to whether she should admit him.

"Thank you," said Bourne, pushing past her. "I'm sure she's expecting me."

He glanced to right and left as he entered the hall, but did not hesitate; a knowledge of such old houses as this one was a part of his inheritance. An instinct for the anatomy of any long-

established home led him unerringly to a closed door which he opened without knocking and quietly closed behind him.

The great brown room seemed throbbingly silent, yet very much alive. A wood fire burned busily in a wide hearth; the drawn curtains admitted the soft light of the winter day and the deep shadows reached forward as though to welcome its gentle presence. On the floor before the fire sat Alloway, leaning back against the seat of a low couch, and all about her were scattered open books which by their full-page illustrations he could see to be rare tomes of travel, treatises on ancient ceramics, and priceless catalogues of the noble textures which have graced the halls of temples and of kings.

Her hair lay upon her back in a loosed flood of gold, constrained at the neck only by a great bow of bronze-colored ribbon. She wore a simple frock of dark brown cut in a square yoke upon her white shoulders, and within its soft folds gleamed the pallor of her folded arms. Her knees were steeply raised, and over them she gazed into the fire, her eyes wide and luminous. On her still face a heartbreaking wistfulness lay like a transparent but integral shadow.

"Alloway!" whispered Bourne.

Without visible movement she grew vibrantly

alert; then her head turned very slowly, as though her eyes would sweep the wide world upon which they had been gazing, to catch upon its very horizon an expected messenger of glad tidings. They came to rest with an abrupt stop on Bourne's figure, and with a movement as of rising waters enveloped him gradually in a warm flood of understanding vision; still she did not move or speak.

He dropped his hat, stepped forward, and kneeled beside her. "Alloway," he whispered, his eyes giving hers flood for flood, "I have come back to you; I want you to take me into your dreams of far places and never, never again leave me behind in the ugly desert world of a heart terribly alone. Oh, darling, forgive me! Take me back! I'm going to cry like a baby. For God's own sake let me hide my face in your breast!"

With a single swift movement of her supple body Alloway arose and stepped back from him. He sprang to his feet and stood erect before her, clenched hands at his sides. He was conscious of a sinking of the heart, suddenly halted as the new strength, acquired through hours of suffering, welled up within him and held him steady under the fire of her measuring regard. He experienced an extraordinary moment of detach-

ment, as though he had become a mere spectator, a disinterested onlooker beside a field of battle. Scales fell from his eyes.

Before him stood no creature of fancy, but a woman, subject to age, to grief, and conceivably to sin. The hair falling in disorder upon her shoulders did not seem incongruous; it but added its note to the revealing moment. Drawn to her full stature, she gave the impression of a serene arbiter holding the even scales of justice, though in trembling hands. He was aware of measuring his immobility against hers, of pitting power against an almost impersonal resistance and gradually conquering.

Quite suddenly she melted. Youth returned to its own. Her face became girlish, convulsed. "Ritt!" she cried, and hurled herself into his arms.

"I've never traveled," she sobbed. "I've never seen the Middle Kingdom or the Persian looms or the Ouvidor in Rio or the Street of the Theaters in Old Kyoto. I'm a country girl. Just here I've lived always and always until my father died, and I grew lonely and ran away and played with fancies and began to live fancies and —and lied my way into your heart! You said—you said—you talked about the 'holding power of mystery.' It was the first serious thing you

ever said to me. How could I forget it? I remembered it always; I tried to tangle you in just a spider's web spun in the corner of an old walled garden. Men, big men like you, can't be held by—by foolish gossamer."

Her voice broke on that first surrender to philosophic deduction. Ritt gathered her into his arms, cradled and rocked her to and fro. "Finish crying," he whispered in her ear, "and then listen to me. Will you? Will you listen now?"

She nodded her head against his breast, drew two deep whimpering sighs and then looked anxiously up into his face.

"You are the eighth and ninth wonders of the small round world," he began. "If we could live side by side for a thousand years I'd never finish unraveling all the paths of you. While I stood there, just inside the door, and watched, I knew that you were a thousand women, one for each of the thousand years; and that if you would only let me stay I could find one of you every spring, woo her every summer, win her in October, and hold her for just a winter. Don't send me away, Alloway, my dear," he begged. "Oh, darling, I love you so!"

She raised her lips to his and he kissed them gently, as though he were half afraid.

"Never. I'll never send you away," she

whispered, "because you found me. But, Ritt, it *is* wicked to lie, isn't it?"

"Very," said Bourne, promptly. "Do you love me?"

"I do," replied Alloway.

"You'll never run one inch away from my heart again?"

She did not answer. Alarmed by the pause, he looked down into her face, but smiled when he saw the roguish light in her eyes and the mischievous quirk of her lips.

"Supposing," she said, "just supposing that we were out in the garden here on a summer's night and I should see one of those slanting beams that climb from the fairies' pot of gold to kiss the laughing moon; supposing I should run up it and dig hard little stars out of the astonished sky and—and pelt you with them—would you call that running away from your heart?"

"No," said Ritt. "I would call it running straight into it."

He sat down on the couch and drew her into the angle of his arm. "Come close to me," he said; "closer. It's only when I feel how warm you are that I can touch ground with my feet. Do you know, dear, that it was really *your* head that got caught between the balusters at the Murray Hill house?"

"Truly, Ritt?" cried Alloway. "I thought I must have dreamed it."

"I, too," said Ritt. "I suppose we all have realities like that mixed with our childhood's dreams. It's wonderful and amazing, just a little unsettling, to catch up with a dream. I don't know how others see you—whether they say, 'There goes a fine-looking girl,' and let it pass at that—perhaps I have been struck by the old, old blindness which is the greatest gift of God; but all I ask is to be near you, to touch you with groping hands, to weigh you on a scale as light as the swaying bough of a rose bush, to hear you murmur, 'I was born under no cloud, but at the meeting of night and day,' and to learn long afterward how soft the caress your tongue had laid on the sacrifice of your mother, who gave her life that you might live."

Alloway drew a long, quivering breath.

"There, dear, don't cry," continued Ritt, holding her body still nearer to him. "Hearts do not live by happiness alone. Remember that. Grief doesn't bruise them; only treachery. I regret nothing; neither the fool that passion made of me, nor the fright and torment of the hours we have been apart, nor even the hurt to you. How else could I have found you—truly found you—crept straight into the arms of your

childhood across the threshold of this throbbing room?"

Alloway's eyes wandered and hung poised here and there with slow deepenings in their expression of affection. "I never think of it as a room," she said, presently; "it's just part of me like my hand or my leg, something one couldn't possibly cut off and live. If some terrible thing had prevented your coming, this room would have saved me as it saved my father. We used to travel here a great deal, Ritt. He was a wonderful man—an endless man. Everybody in the village knew him; but no one knew all of him—not even I."

"You can never quite know," said Ritt, "just how the tale printed at his death rang out across the world. I won't ever be able to tell you just what it awakened in me; I'll have to live it to you day by day. That dry newspaper story was like the shell of a great bronze bell pealing out the news that love still lives."

"How extraordinary!" exclaimed Alloway. "How wonderful that you should say that!" She turned in his arms, freed her hands, and drew from a drawer in the massive table behind the couch a large square book, so loosely bound that it opened flat upon her knee. On the front cover, in bold lettering, stood the name of Eben

Schuyler, and within, each page bore a single entry written in a severe Spencerian hand, blacker and clearer than print. Turning the leaves rapidly, Alloway laid her finger on the last writing in the volume.

"Read it, Ritt," she whispered. "Read it aloud to me."

Bourne read the lines first to himself and then aloud in a voice which he himself scarcely recognized.

"Love lives,
Love breathes,
Love rides the wind;
Uncaged, its laughing pinions sweep the skies
Above the tiny snares our hearts still set
To trap it.

"Yet will I stand with face upturned,
Myself a cup of faith,
Content that in my breast hath lodged
A single fluttering feather from the wings of God."

THE END